

*The Archaeology of Morris Cohen: A Jewish Farmer's Victory over a Groundhog in
Nineteenth-Century Green Brook, New Jersey*

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Excavations at the Vermeule-Mundy House uncovered a rich artifact deposit dating to the mid-1860s. The artifacts can be associated with Morris Cohen, an early Jewish farmer to settle in rural New Jersey, where he raised a family, a range of animals, and grains, and produced a large amount of butter. In an effort to deter a groundhog from burrowing under their porch, the Cohens placed hundreds of ceramic, glass, and iron objects into the burrow. These artifacts provide information about their table settings and agricultural production, and they may provide details about Cohen's socioeconomic status as well as his Jewish ethnicity through the use of multiple ceramic and glass sets as well as a preference for olive oil.

Introduction

Archaeology has great value for revealing information and narratives about people from the past, particularly those who have historically been overlooked, discriminated against, or otherwise just limited to impersonal bureaucratic records. Sometimes an archaeologist stumbles across an object or deposit that speaks to a particular moment in someone's life, sometimes with enough detail and context to convey their beliefs or emotions to us in the present. During an archaeological investigation prompted by renovations to the Vermeule-Mundy House in Green Brook, Somerset County, New Jersey, an unusual deposit found beneath a front porch revealed such a moment (Figure 1). The effort of a Jewish farmer, Morris Cohen, and his family as they thwarted further burrowing by a groundhog in the 1860s provides one of these moments where archaeology can reveal information about the lives of frequently underrepresented people. As

historian Gertrude Wishnick Dubrovsky states, “If the role of the immigrant farmer in America has been played down, that of the Jewish immigrant farmer has virtually been ignored.”¹ While Dubrovsky is largely referring to the influx of Russian Jewish farmers of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, her statement is even truer for those earlier Jewish farmers.

Built about 1800, the Vermeule-Mundy House had undergone a series of ownerships before it was ultimately acquired by Green Brook Township. The site was initially part of a 116-acre tract of land owned by John Laing, who sold it to Cornelius Vermeule Sr. in 1768.² Cornelius Sr. had four sons: Adrian, Gerrity, Eder, and Cornelius Jr. Adrian was wounded and captured in January 1777, dying in March as a prisoner of war in New York’s infamous sugar house prison and leaving a wife, a son, and two daughters.³ In his will, dated August 1, 1783, Cornelius Sr. directed that his real estate was to be divided equally among his three surviving sons, Frederick, Eder, and Cornelius Jr., and his 15-year-old grandson (Adrian’s son, John). John gained control of the property in 1788 when he reached 20 years of age, and his inheritance included all of the land originally purchased from John Laing, as well as an adjoining 10-acre parcel and an 8-acre lot containing an orchard and dwelling. This inherited dwelling was not the Vermeule-Mundy House, but one on an adjoining lot.⁴ John would build the extant Vermeule-Mundy House in about 1800, before moving to the farm with his family.

¹ Gertrude Wishnick Dubrovsky, *The Land was Theirs, Jewish Farmers in the Garden State* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1992), 1–2.

² NJ Wills 729R.; Somerset County Mortgages, Book J:164.

³ Cornelius Vermeule, *The Revolutionary Camp Ground at Plainfield, New Jersey. An Address Delivered before the Continental Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, January 9, 1923*. Typewritten manuscript in Green Brook Historical Society. Green Brook, New Jersey.

⁴ Dennis Bertland Associates, *Dr. John Vermeule House. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. Report on file, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Trenton, New Jersey, 2010) Section 8:6.

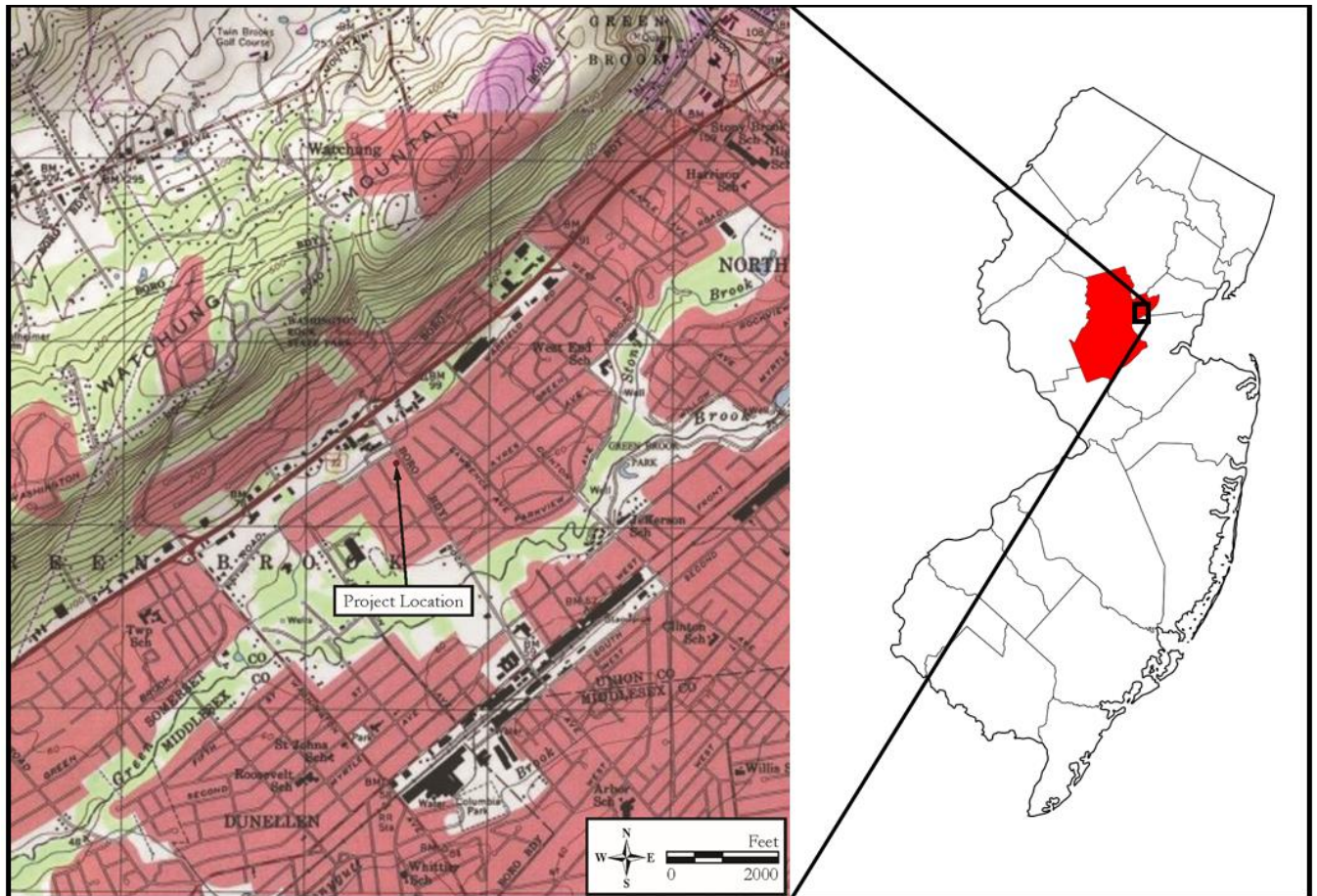


Figure 1: Map showing the location of the Vermeule-Mundy House at the “Project Location” in Green Brook, Somerset County.^{5,6}

After the Vermeules, the house and farm were conveyed to James Vail and Eden Laing in March 1824 to settle debts.⁷ Within the year, Vail and Laing sold subdivided interests in the property, with Vail retaining the house and remaining surrounding farmland. James died on June 28, 1850, with his wife and daughter, Martha, maintaining ownership of the property. Martha died in 1853 and two years later, in 1855, the property was sold to Morris Cohen of Hoboken, New Jersey.⁸

⁵ David Benbennick, “Map of New Jersey Highlighting Somerset County.” *Wikipedia*. Last modified February 12 2006, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_New_Jersey_highlighting_Somerset_County.svg.

⁶ 7.5' *Quadrangle: Plainfield*, prepared by United States Geological Survey (Washington D.C, 1995).

⁷ Somerset County Mortgages, Book L:120.

⁸ Somerset County Mortgages, Book V2:457.

Morris Cohen was born in Poland in 1806 and immigrated to the United States prior to 1840, when he married Ann Maria (née van Duzer) from New York. While Morris was likely Jewish, Ann Maria was not, as indicated by her fore- and surnames. The Cohens had seven children by 1853, all of whom were born in New York,⁹ and the family was living in Hoboken when they purchased the farm in Green Brook. Cohen was listed as a farmer in the 1860 census, with real estate valued at \$8,000. The agricultural schedule of the 1860 census listed Cohen as a farmer with 80 acres of “improved land” and 20 acres of “unimproved land,” valued at \$8,000. Livestock included horses, milk cows, cattle, and pigs. Listed farm products included rye, corn, oats, buckwheat, hay, peas, beans, and a notable 450 pounds of butter.¹⁰ In 1860, his family included his wife, sons Bennett (age 19) and William (age 14), and daughters Jane (age 16), Frances (age 15), Sarah (age 13), Grace (age 10), and Hannah (age 7).¹¹ While living in Green Brook, two additional children were born, Laura (born about 1862) and Morris Jr. (born about 1865).¹²

When the Cohens moved to Green Brook, the area was still rural with limited commercial development, as depicted on a contemporary map by S. N. Beers and D. J. Lake.¹³ Homes in the area were still owned by many of the earliest Green Brook settler families, including the Shotwells, Vails, Randolphs, Boices, Staats, and Cadmus. The name of M. Cohen stands out not only for being a newer resident of the area but also for representing a new cultural tradition in the neighborhood. Morris Cohen’s adventure in agriculture was relatively rare for Jewish people prior

⁹ *Population Schedule, Somerset County, New Jersey*, prepared by the United States Bureau of the Census (Washington D.C., 1860).

¹⁰ *Agricultural Schedule, Somerset County, New Jersey*, prepared by the United States Bureau of the Census (Washington D.C., 1860).

¹¹ *Population Schedule, 1860*

¹² *Population Schedule, Somerset County, New Jersey*, prepared by the United States Bureau of the Census (Washington D.C., 1870).

¹³ S. N. Beers and D. J. Lake, *Map of the Vicinity of Philadelphia and Trenton* (C. K. Stone and A. Pomeroy, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1860).

to the 1880s, when Jews from Russia would increasingly take up farming and egg production in southern New Jersey.¹⁴

The Cohens would sell the farm in March 1868, with the family moving to Jersey City, where he and his son Bennet were listed as being occupied in “preserving and pickling.”¹⁵ After the Cohens sold the farm, it passed to multiple speculators and residents, with the landholdings occasionally being split among heirs. While much of the farm was sold off throughout the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Green Brook developed into a residential suburb, in 1951, a small lot of farmland with the Vermeule-Mundy House was conveyed to Irving Mundy from his parents.¹⁶ Irving inherited the property following the death of his mother in 1973, and lived on the property until his death on March 16, 2006. Using an Open Space Trust Fund, Green Brook Township completed the purchase of the property in December 2008.¹⁷

The Archaeology

Green Brook Township has undertaken significant rehabilitation work at the Vermeule Mundy House since taking ownership in 2008. Part of this has included architectural restoration, a dendrochronological investigation, and archaeological surveys.¹⁸

¹⁴ Dennis Bertland Associates, *Dr. John Vermeule House*, Section 8:12.; Joseph Brandes, *Immigrants to Freedom, Jewish Communities in Rural New Jersey since 1882*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).; Dubrovsky, *The Land was Theirs.*; Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in New Jersey, 1882–1920* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ *Population Schedule, Hudson County, New Jersey, prepared by the United States Bureau of the Census (Washington D.C., 1870)*.

¹⁶ Somerset County Mortgages, Book 764:378.; Somerset County Mortgages, Book 1270:713.

¹⁷ Dennis Bertland Associates *Dr. John Vermeule House*, Section 8:16.

¹⁸ Adam R. Heinrich, *Archaeological Monitoring, Electrical Utility Trench Installation, Vermeule-Mundy House, Green Brook Township, Somerset County, New Jersey*. (Cranbury, New Jersey: Richard Grubb and Associates, 2014).; Adam R. Heinrich and Laura Cushman, *Archaeological Monitoring, the Vermeule-Mundy House, 223 Rock Avenue, Block 89, Lots 24.01 & 24.02, Green Brook Township, Somerset County* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Richard Grubb and Associates, 2015).; Richard Veit, *Dendrochronological Study of the Vermeule/Mundy House, Rock Avenue, Greenbrook, Somerset County, NJ*. (South Plainfield, New Jersey: report prepared for Green Brook Township, 2009).; Richard Veit and Poul Graverson, *Phase I/II Archaeological Investigation at the Vermeule-Mundy House, 223 Rock Avenue, Green Brook, NJ 08812 (28-So-160)* (South Plainfield, New Jersey: report prepared for Green Brook Township, 2012).

During an effort to repoint the foundation stonework, a trench was being excavated along the front southeast-facing façade of the house. During the excavation of the trench, a dense concentration of artifacts was exposed at the midpoint of the façade under the location of a removed porch. Further exposure of the artifacts revealed that the concentration was within a rodent burrow, called Feature 3. The rodent burrow was filled with a reddish-brown (5YR 4/3) silty loam, and it followed a curvilinear shape with a round cross section that ran from the ground surface toward the foundation and then along the foundation in a southwesterly direction through a red (2.5YR 5/6) silty subsoil (Figure 2). No modification of the burrow was noted, such as widening to fit the artifacts. The artifacts appeared to have been densely stacked and pushed deep into the hole along the foundation about three feet from the entrance of the burrow and about one foot below the ground surface (Figure 3). The density and depth of the packed artifacts within the rodent disturbance indicates an intentional filling of the hole in an attempt to eliminate the rodent activity at the front of the house.¹⁹

The artifacts recovered from Feature 3 totaled 910 pieces of ceramics, glass, and iron objects. All recovered artifacts consist of distinctively hard and sharp fragments, which seem to have been used to deter the rodent activity. Notably, organic material such as bones did not seem to be included in the fill of Feature 3. The ability to make frequent cross-mends between ceramic and glass fragments suggests that the deposit derived from disused materials collected from a stash of objects such as a refuse pile that were then stacked and pushed into the burrow.

¹⁹ Heinrich and Cushman, *Archaeological Monitoring, the Vermeule-Mundy House*.

The Artifacts

Ceramics comprise the majority of the Feature 3 assemblage, with 729 artifacts (80.1 percent of total assemblage) and can speak to activities carried out within the house and on the farm. Household ceramics include a high proportion made of white granite ironstone (n = 265 fragments, 36.4 percent of the ceramics) and porcelain (n = 85 fragments, 11.7 percent of the ceramics) used as table settings for presenting and consuming foods and beverages. Vessels in both ironstone and porcelain include plates, saucers, cups, bowls, and other indeterminate vessels that likely represent additional food serving vessels. An ironstone chamber pot is also present.

Primarily, the ironstone vessels consist of white molded designs lacking color applied through transfer printing, painting, or pigments. Decorations included rims molded into octagonal, scalloped, and round shapes (Figure 4). Near-rim and body decorations are also molded into low-relief scalloped, acanthus, wheat, classical, paneled, fluted, and floral motifs. Two plates with round rim shapes are decorated with an ogee arch-style motif. Motifs were also shared across vessel forms, indicating the presence of matched sets used within the house. The acanthus pattern is best represented as a matched set, as it is represented by a plate and several saucers and cups. Porcelain vessels are also primarily undecorated, though one cup has fluted sides.



Figure 2: Overhead photograph of the artifact deposit within the groundhog burrow, showing the path of the burrow from the mid-foreground toward the foundation and then to the southwest (to the left).



Figure 3: Profile view of the artifact deposit within the groundhog burrow, with its entrance to the right and then continuing to the foundation and then toward the left foreground.



Figure 4: A selection of ironstone saucer, cup, and plate fragments with various decorative motifs, and glass tumblers recovered from the groundhog burrow.



Figure 5: A reconstructed five-gallon redware butter pot and a one-gallon stoneware butter pot made by the Pruden pottery in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Colored decorations are limited to some select table settings. A pair of ironstone plates and an asparagus dish are decorated with chinoiserie flow blue designs (n = 19 fragments). Transfer-printed landscapes in blue (n = 6 fragments) are present on a large lid for an ironstone serving vessel and also a small bowl. Two fragments from a polychrome hand-painted pearlware bowl (1815–1830) were also recovered from Feature 3 and could represent an old piece of ceramic used well after its manufacturing period or something left at the house by previous occupants.²⁰

Other ceramic vessels recovered from Feature 3 represent activities involving food preparation or storage (n = 204). Slip-trailed redware dishes were represented by numerous fragments due to friability of the vessel type, though a minimum of three dishes are represented. Ceramic vessels related to industry at the site include those used for dairy production. A minimum of 11 milk pans are present in yellowware (n = 100 fragments) and an additional one is made of redware (n = 1 fragment). Three butter pots were also identified, including two approximately one-gallon stoneware pots (n = 40 fragments) and an approximately five-gallon redware pot (n = 63 fragments) (Figure 5). Terra-cotta flowerpots were also used within the Feature 3 fill (n = 28 fragments, four vessels). Figure 3 shows how one of these flowerpots was pushed into the burrow.

The glass (n = 177 fragments, 19.5 percent) include drinking glasses such as tumblers and stemmed glass, perfume bottles, pharmaceutical bottles, and beverage bottles. Drinking glass primarily consists of tumblers (n = 24 fragments), with two identifiable stemware vessels. The tumblers are represented by a minimum of four vessels of three different styles (see Figure 4). Beverage bottles were not diagnostic, though light aqua-colored glass commonly from soda or beer bottles was recovered. Five olive oil bottles are present and demonstrate narrow but tall

²⁰ Maryland Archaeological Conservancy Lab, "Post-Colonial Ceramics," *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland*, Last modified October 26, 2015, <https://apps.jefpat.maryland.gov/diagnostic/Post-Colonial%20Ceramics/index-PostColonialCeramics.htm>.

bodies, with two being of blown glass and the other three being molded. Pharmaceutical and personal hygiene bottles were also relatively undiagnostic unless they were embossed. One bottle was embossed “CHEMICAL” and a second was embossed “. . . RSH.S.W [P]AIN [RELI]EVER.” A paneled pharmaceutical-style hair product bottle was embossed “PHALON & SON.” Embossed bottles indicate mercantile connections to New York City, with four bottles identifying that city as their origin, including the Phalon & Son bottle. A perfume bottle’s embossing identifies that it originated in Paris.

Other artifacts recovered from Feature 3 include architectural and personal items. Machine-cut and wrought nails (n = 3, 0.3 percent) represent the only architectural materials. A porcelain knob represents interior furnishings. A one-inch diameter porcelain teacup and three porcelain torso and head fragments from two different dolls represent children’s toys.

Dating the Assemblage

The ironstone tableware provides the most detailed information for dating the in-filling of the rodent burrow. The vessels presented in Table 1 are predominately molded, and though various designs were used throughout the production of ironstone, the designs changed in popularity through time. According to Wetherbee,²¹ floral, harvest (wheat), and Classical (Greek shape, acanthus leaves) were most popular during the late 1850s through the 1860s, while geometric and scalloped designs were most common during the 1840s and 1850s. Undecorated, plain-edged ironstone vessels were most popular from the 1870s but appear earlier, as will be shown below. With the high proportion of molded decorated vessels, the assemblage would fit best within the period from the 1850s to the 1860s.

²¹ Jean Wetherbee, *Second Look at White Ironstone* (Lombard, Illinois: A. Wallace Homestead Book Company, 1985) 87–130.

Potter's maker's marks and registration marks present on a few vessels further place the manufacture of the ceramics into the third quarter of the nineteenth century (Table 2). The marks all indicate third quarter of the nineteenth century dates. The stoneware butter pot made by J.M. Pruden in Elizabeth, New Jersey, indicates a manufacture period up to 1865 before he established a Manhattan distributorship.²² While undecorated, round-rimmed ironstone was most popular in the 1870s–1880s,²³ the marks by Wedgwood on a plate and a saucer indicate that they were also made during the 1850s–1860s. Five registration marks are present in the style used between 1842 and 1867, though only two were legible enough to identify the registration year. A plate made by the George Wolliscroft (also spelled Wooliscroft on a second vessel in the assemblage) pottery contains a registration mark from 1859. A pair of matching wheat-pattern saucers from the Davenport pottery contain registration marks from 1863, which provide the *terminus post quem* for the deposit and suggest that the rodent burrow was filled in or shortly after 1863.

The glass artifacts were generally not diagnostic enough to provide tight dating information. The sole exception is the bottle for the Phalon & Son hair product produced between 1858 and 1885.²⁴

²² William C. Ketchum, *American Stoneware* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991).

²³ Maryland Archaeological Conservancy Lab, "Post-Colonial Ceramics;" Wetherbee, *Second Look at White Ironstone*, 87–130.

²⁴ Don Fadely, "Edward Phalon & Sons," Hair Raising Stories, last modified 2013, <http://www.hairraisingstories.com/Proprietors/PHALON.html>.

Table 1: Ironstone ceramic vessels and designs from the Feature 3 assemblage.

Vessel Type	Rim Shape	Decoration	Number of Fragments*	Minimum Number of Vessels
Plate	Octagonal	Scalloped	13	1
		None	1	1
	Scalloped	None	5	1
	Round	Acanthus	1	1
		Ogee	10	2
		None	4	2
Saucer	Round	Acanthus	14	2
		Scalloped	4	2
		Wheat	3	2
Cup	Round	Acanthus	8	3
		Paneled	10	1
		None	3	1
Bowl	Octagonal	Fluted	1	1
		Other	1	1
	Round	Greek	2	1
	Scalloped	Fluted	1	1
Indeterminate	Octagonal	Geometric	1	1
		Paneled	35	2
	Round	Floral	1	1
	Indeterminate	Floral	5	1
Totals			123	28

* Only includes diagnostic rim and body fragments.

Table 2: Manufacturing dates for ceramics recovered from Feature 3.

Ware Type	Maker	Vessel	Decoration	Manufacturing Dates	Minimum Number of Vessels
Redware	-	Pie plates	Slip-trailed	1750–1900	3
Redware	-	Butter pot	Undecorated	Indeterminate	1
Redware	-	Milk pan	Undecorated	Indeterminate	1
Terra-cotta	-	Flowerpot	Undecorated	Indeterminate	4
Pearlware	-	Bowl	Polychrome hand-painted	1815–1830	1
Porcelain	-	Various	Generally undecorated	1830–1900	Not determined
Porcelain	-	Bowl	Generally undecorated	1830–1900	3
Porcelain	-	Cup	Generally undecorated	1830–1900	4
Porcelain	-	Saucer	Generally undecorated	1830–1900	1
Porcelain	-	Plate	Generally undecorated	1830–1900	3
Porcelain	-	Pitcher	Generally undecorated	1830–1900	1
Porcelain	-	Doll		Indeterminate	1
Porcelain	-	Toy teacup		Indeterminate	1
Whiteware	-	Plate	Light blue transfer-printed	1818–1867	1
Yellowware	-	Milk pan	Undecorated	1830–1940	11
Stoneware	J.M. Pruden	Butter pot	Blue boat/flower	1840s–1865	1
Stoneware		Butter pot	Undecorated	1805–1900	1
Ironstone	Holland & Green	Saucer	Scalloped	1853–1882	2
Ironstone	George Wolliscroft [sic]	Plate	Indeterminate	1851–1864 (Registration Mark: 1859)	1
Ironstone	George Wooliscroft [sic]	Plate	Ogee arch	1851–1864 (Registration Mark Style: 1842–1867)	1
Ironstone	Davenport	Saucer	Wheat	Registration Mark: 1863	2
Ironstone	. . . & Son	Saucer	Acanthus	Registration Mark Style: 1842–1867	1
Ironstone	Wedgewood Pearl Ironstone	Plate and saucer	Undecorated	1850s–1860s	2
Ironstone		Various	Various	1842–1900s	15
Ironstone		Serving vessel	Light blue transfer-printed	1842–1867	1
Ironstone		Plates, asparagus dish	Flow blue	1842–1880	3

Discussion

The artifact assemblage recovered from the in-filled rodent burrow represents one of the richest cultural deposits found during the various archaeological efforts at the Vermeule-Mundy House. As the ceramic and glassware types, ceramic decorative motifs, and maker's marks reveal that the deposit discretely dates to the mid-1860s, the deposit can be associated with Morris Cohen and his family, who owned and operated the farm from 1855 until 1868, when they moved to Jersey City. During their time in Green Brook, the Cohens were a large and growing family with three sons and six daughters. The recovery of the toy porcelain teacup and doll parts speaks to the presence of the younger Cohen children at the site.

Morris Cohen's name indicates that he was Jewish, though it is unclear if he was religiously observant. His wife was from a Dutch-descendent Protestant family, though it is possible that she could have converted. The naming of his youngest son, Morris Jr., may also indicate a lack of observance, as naming children after a living relative was taboo for Ashkenazi Jews, though it was encouraged in Sephardic groups.²⁵ The Agricultural Schedule of the 1860 US Census records pigs on the property, which may not have been permissible in an Orthodox kosher household, though pig bones have been found at an Orthodox rabbi's house from 1840s Five Points, New York; a frontier Jewish merchant's house in Washington, Arkansas; as well as two Jewish households in the mining town of Aurora, Nevada.²⁶ Rural Jews of the earlier eighteenth century were generally considered to not be strictly observant of kosher restrictions and would consume pork when available, particularly as properly prepared kosher meats were not available far from the

²⁵ Parshat Shemot, "The Laws of Jewish Names," *Chabad.org*, last updated 2021

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1158837/jewish/The-Laws-of-Jewish-Names.htm

²⁶ Claudia Milne and Pamela Crabtree, "Prostitutes, a Rabbi, and a Carpenter- Dinner at the Five Points in the 1830s," *Historical Archaeology* 35, no. 3(2001): 31–48.; Leslie C. Stewart-Abernathy, and Barbara L. Ruff, "A Good Man in Israel: Zooarchaeology and Assimilation in Antebellum Washington, Washington, Arkansas," *Historical Archaeology* 23, no. 2 (1989): 96–112.; Ashlee Younie, "Consumption in the American Mining West: Substitute and Complement Goods in the Foodways of Aurora, Nevada." (master's thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 2014).

congregations in the large cities.²⁷ Without bones from the deposit, it cannot be determined if the pigs raised on Cohen's farm were consumed on-site or sold elsewhere.

Morris Cohen lived within a particular historic context when new sects (such as Reform Judaism) were prominently developing in central Europe during the early nineteenth century, born out of the principles of Enlightenment thought and the Republican ideals of the French Revolution. It is possible that being born in Poland in 1806 and immigrating around 1840, Morris could have been part of the mid-century Reform Jewish diaspora that drew primarily from German areas of central Europe. By the 1880s, roughly 90 percent of Jewish people in the United States were Reform Jews, who viewed several traditions (such as kosher laws) as anachronistic and something that individuals themselves could choose to accept or modify.²⁸ While Reformed Jews may not have continued to observe some practices, others, such as the use of multiple table settings and oil for cooking, may have been continued due to their shared heritage or personal preferences. Attempts to determine if the Cohens attended a synagogue in Manhattan, Hoboken, or Jersey City turned up no records, but if the Cohens did belong to a congregation, they would have most likely attended a small shul, which were numerous in the 1860s and 1870s.²⁹

Jewish families had settled throughout New Jersey since the early eighteenth century, though they seem to have been relatively dispersed, with no cohesive Jewish communities forming until the mid-nineteenth century. These early settlers may have been more fluid in their Jewish identities and practices than their counterparts, who settled in proximity to synagogues in the

²⁷ J. R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776*. (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1970) 1227.; Elizabeth M. Scott, "Who Ate What? Archaeological Food Remains and Cultural Diversity," in *Case Studies in Environmental Archaeology*, eds. Elizabeth J. Reitz, Lee A. Newsome, and Sylvia J. Scudder (New York, New York: Plenum Press, 1996) 344–345, 350–351.

²⁸ American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, "Reform Judaism: The Origins of Reform Judaism." *Jewish Virtual Library*, last modified 2015,

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/The_Origins_of_Reform_Judaism.html.

²⁹ Rabbi Debra Hachen, Temple Beth-El, Jersey City, email communication, February 24, 2015.

cities.³⁰ Rurally situated Jews who did sustain stronger links to their ethnicity or faith may have maintained connections to the communities in the nearest cities, as illustrated by Abraham Isaac Abrahams, the earliest known mohel, who traveled from New York City to Spotswood in Middlesex County to perform a circumcision for a son of Myers Levy in 1760.³¹ As demonstrated by Abrahams's travels, rural Jews (such as the Cohens a century later) likely could still maintain some of their traditional ritual practices while distant from Jewish communities. By the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish congregations were being established throughout the state, including Plainfield and Elizabeth in Union County, in relative proximity to the Cohens in Green Brook.

Whether Morris Cohen and his family were Orthodox, Reform, or nonobservant, his Jewish ethnicity could have still been part of his identity and could have influenced behaviors within the household and relations with others in his community. Therefore, Morris Cohen and his family were relatively uncommon and early Jewish farmers in rural New Jersey well before the Jewish farming initiatives that started in the 1880s, settling thousands of Russian Jews throughout southern New Jersey.³² An advertising idealism promoted for the diaspora of the Russian Jews was that the agrarian pursuits and “a return to the soil . . . would enable Jews to lead a natural life in which manual labor would be respected” while also helping dispel anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews being “unproductive middlemen” of the urban centers.³³ Without accounts from the Cohens, it will remain unknown why the family took up agriculture in Green Brook, but the philosophy of agrarian

³⁰ Dubrovsky, *The Land was Theirs*, 294–295.

³¹ Ruth Marcus Patt, *The Jewish Scene in New Jersey's Raritan Valley 1698–1948* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Jewish Historical Society of Raritan Valley, 1978) 13.

³² Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in New Jersey*.; Siobhan O'Keefe and Sarah Quincy, “Old Immigrants, New Niches: Russian Jewish Agricultural Colonies and Native Workers in Southern New Jersey, 1880–1910,” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2018): 20–38.

³³ Edward Shapiro, “The Jews of New Jersey,” in *The New Jersey Ethnic Experience*, ed. Barbara Cunningham (Union City, New Jersey Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1977) 300.

idealism that would encourage the major Russian Jewish diaspora may have inspired some within the urban Jewish communities decades earlier.

While the in-filled groundhog burrow speaks to rodent problems on the farm and an effort by the Cohens to control pests digging around their foundation beneath the porch at the front door, the measures taken incorporated a large collection of household and farm-related artifacts that can speak to their lives in 1850s and 1860s Green Brook. Census records indicate that the Cohens were a middle- to upper-middle-class family. The 1860 US Census records their property value at \$8,000, which ranks among the uppermost quarter of property values in the community. While farming was still a prominent occupation in the Green Brook area in 1860, the Cohens' higher property value probably indicates a relatively larger amount of land compared to their neighbors, as surrounding lands were increasingly being subdivided and developed for people pursuing nonagricultural occupations. While their real estate value was above average, the Cohens' "Personal Estate" value at \$500 places the family within the modal wealth bracket of their community, which was significantly less than approximately a third of other community members with "Personal Estate" values recorded between \$1,000 and \$5,000. The disparity in property and personal wealth may reflect the increased development around Green Brook, where farmers were selling off land to development, while the Cohens still maintained a sizable property.

Ceramics make up most of the collection and provide information about how the Cohens furnished their tables and kitchens. Of the ceramics, molded white granite ironstones and porcelain settings were preferred for serving food and drink, particularly warm beverages such as tea or coffee. Non-printed and non-painted white-bodied porcelain and refined earthenware ceramic wares with molded motifs were among the most expensive ceramic types compared to decorated

wares in the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps speaking to the family's economic standing.³⁴ These expensive white ceramics make up 48.1 percent of the ceramic fragment assemblage but 64.6 percent of the identified vessels.

In the Feature 3 assemblage, ironstone vessels are represented by at least three sets for each vessel type. Plates are present with three rim shapes (octagonal, scalloped, and round); saucers (acanthus, wheat, and scalloped) and cups (acanthus, fluted, and undecorated) are present with three motifs; but bowls demonstrate four designs (octagonal fluted, scalloped fluted, Greek shaped, and octagonal indeterminate). In addition to the ironstone table settings, glass tumblers are also represented by three different styles. The repetition of three types of designs in some of the ironstone tableware and the glass tumblers is intriguing in the context of the Cohens' Jewish ethnicity. Kosher households could maintain at least three sets of vessels in order to observe the separation of meat and dairy for everyday meals, with the third setting for the added kosher requirements of Passover and the possibility of additional settings for other needs, such as non-kosher consumption.³⁵ Multiple table setting styles have been proposed to represent efforts at maintaining kosher meals at another Jewish site, the early twentieth-century Shapiro House in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.³⁶

While the presence of several sets could represent efforts to separate food to conform to religious tenets, multiple ceramic settings are regularly identified at sites dating to the mid- to later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Affluent households such as the Hursts in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, also owned multiple matched sets, though these settings were a mix of printed and

³⁴ George Miller, "Classification and Economic Scaling of 19th Century Ceramics," *Historical Archaeology* 14 (1980): 3.

³⁵ Tracy Rich, "Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Laws," Judaism 101, last modified 2020, <http://www.jewfaq.org/kashrut.htm>.; Ellen Umansky, "Three Sets of Dishes," The Jewish Book Council, last modified February 20, 2017, <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/three-sets-of-dishes>.

³⁶ Alexandra Martin, *Shapiro Site Archaeology Report* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Strawberry Banke Museum, 1999).

undecorated wares, as the site dates to the later nineteenth century, when printed wares were increasingly coming back into fashion.³⁷ Ceramics recovered from the affluent Woodruff household in Rahway, New Jersey, dating to the 1870s–1880s, also show multiple sets of ceramic table settings comparable to the Hursts. The Woodruffs' white ironstone setting is in plain, round-edged style, while additional settings include one light blue transfer-printed design and two different "Flow Blue" designs.³⁸ At affluent households such as the Hursts and Woodruffs, possibly due to their more urban settings, multiple matched sets of table settings have been interpreted to indicate formal, ritualized, multicourse dining where manners and the material goods were displayed to guests. This may just as well have been true of the aforementioned Jewish sites.

While multiple sets of table settings can be observed on Jewish and non-Jewish sites, the frequent use of olive oil seems to be consistent with sites occupied by Jewish people. The recovery of five olive oil bottles from Feature 3 may represent efforts that the Cohens took to maintain an element of kosher adherence. Similarly, six olive oil bottles were also recovered from a circa 1840s privy context associated with the Orthodox Rabbi Harris Goldberg in Five Points, New York City, while other contemporary sites in Five Points did not have this many.³⁹ Olive oil has a deep history of use in the American colonies, and it was recommended in nineteenth-century Jewish cookery books as a way of frying and basting meats when kosher rules would not allow butter, a dairy, to be mixed with meat.⁴⁰ Forty years later in the 1911 *The Grocer's Encyclopedia*, olive oil was still touted for its qualities in cooking and frying, but the average American household was largely

³⁷ Paul Shackel, *Archaeology and Created Memory: Public History in a National Park* (New York: Plenum Publishers, 2000) 85–89.

³⁸ Brock Giordano and Catherine Bull, *Archaeological Data Recovery, Peace Tavern/Wodruff House Site, 28-UN-42, Dornoch- Rahway I- "The Savoy" Redevelopment Project, City of Rahway, Union County, New Jersey* (Highland Park, New Jersey: Cultural Resources Consulting Group, 2008) 109–118.

³⁹ Michael Bonasera, "Condiments and Related Serving Pieces," in *Tales of Five Points: Working-Class Life in Nineteenth-Century New York, Volume II. An Interpretive Approach to Understanding Working Class Life*, ed. Rebecca Yamin (West Chester, Pennsylvania: John Milner Associates, Inc., 2000) 255.

⁴⁰ Esther Levy, *The Jewish Cookery Book* (Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1871).

using the oil for salad dressings, possibly because it was expensive, where one gallon cost about as much as 7.5 pounds of butter.⁴¹ The elevated numbers of olive oil bottles from the two Jewish sites, Morris Cohen and the Rabbi Goldberg, may indicate an element of keeping kosher or possibly a continuation of traditional Jewish cuisine where oil, instead of animal fats such as lard or butter, was used for frying. Olive oil also could have had ritual purposes, as it was the traditional oil to fuel the menorah.⁴²

While table settings and glassware reveal how the Cohens adorned their household and presented their foods at the table, the other significant component of the ceramic assemblage includes those used in their farming industry. The 1860 Agricultural Schedule of the Census records a range of livestock, including horses, milk cows, cattle, and the pigs. The Agricultural Schedule also recorded rye, buckwheat, hay, peas, beans, and a significant 450 pounds of butter. The census reveals that dairy production was a major economic pursuit of the Cohens at their Green Brook farm. The ceramics can well speak to this industry through the 12 milk pans included in the Feature 3 fill, used to collect and cool milk before storage or other processing. Direct evidence of the large quantity of butter is illustrated through the three butter pots identified. The butter pots suggest that large quantities could have been stored in the five-gallon redware pots, while butter could possibly have been sold to consumers or grocers in the smaller one-gallon stoneware pots. Grocers could then sell various weights out of the pot.⁴³

The reasons the Cohens moved to Green Brook from a city and only occupied the farm for about 13 years before returning to urbanization remain unknown. The Cohens' dairy farm was

⁴¹ Artemas Ward, *The Grocer's Encyclopedia* (New York: Stationer's Hall, 1911) 425.

⁴² Nissan Mindel, "Olive Oil" *Chabad.org*, last modified 2021, https://www.chabad.org/kids/article_cdo/aid/114801/jewish/Olive-Oil.htm.

⁴³ Daniel Block, "Butter," in *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink*, ed. Andrew Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 76.

operating at a time when New Jersey agriculture was in an economic decline, as competition from the west—where industrial farms and rail lines could easily bring in agricultural products—were challenging local growers. Farmers who were able to weather some of this competition were those who were able to produce goods that could not be as easily shipped. Dairy products requiring particularly cooler storage and relatively quicker distribution to consumers was one agricultural industry that was able to do well for local farmers in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁴ In the 1850s and 1860s, the Cohens were also just ahead of developments in industrial butter production. By the 1890s, mechanical cream separators that were able to dramatically speed up the production of butter were becoming common, which began removing butter manufacture away from local farmers and bringing it into factories.⁴⁵ Tracing commodity prices in New York, average butter prices peaked between 1864 and 1869, when the price more than doubled in cost to about or above 40 cents per pound compared to 19.4 cents per pound in 1861. In 1869, prices declined relatively regularly to 18.9 cents per pound and butter was not to see the 1864–1869 values again until 1917.⁴⁶ It is possible that dairy production was becoming unprofitable for Cohen’s large family.

Conclusion

When the Cohens collected their broken or worn-out objects in the mid-1860s, they were determined to stop a groundhog from sharing the front yard of their house. Hundreds of sharp ceramic and glass shards with a few nails were stacked and forced a few feet into the hole. It seems that they were victorious, as no additional burrowing was evident under the porch. Through this

⁴⁴ Hubert Schmidt, *Agriculture in New Jersey: A Three-Hundred-Year History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973) 154–156.

⁴⁵ Block, “Butter,” 76.

⁴⁶ Commodity Research Bureau, *Commodity Year Book- 1941* (New York: Commodity Research Bureau, 1941).

action, the Cohens were also able to leave a very discrete deposit of artifacts that has been able to provide information about their lives.

While it remains unknown why the Cohens moved from a bustling urban scene to Green Brook and then returned, the increasingly popular principals of agrarian idealism may have inspired them to leave the urban commotion of Hoboken. They took up farming and dairy production when it was still seemingly profitable for a local farm, and they left about when it was in decline. The Cohens, if practicing Morris's traditional faith, may have been isolated among a rural community of Protestants. Whatever their decisions were, the artifacts they stuffed into a groundhog burrow provide evidence of their taste for pricier table settings and the use of several sets of plates, bowls, and cups in addition to olive oil to possibly maintain faithfulness to traditional Jewish practices. Numerous milk pans and butter pots speak to their efforts to survive on the farm through the production of large quantities of dairy products. Though their presence in Green Brook was relatively short, the Cohens were pioneers as some of the rare Jewish farmers to work New Jersey's land decades before the large diaspora at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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