TESTING AT THE SITE OF A POSSIBLE CIVIL WAR CEMETERY NEAR ROUTE 202 AT THE AUGUSTINE CUTOFF, NEW CASTLE COUNTY, DELAWARE

Introduction

The site of a possible Civil War cemetery was tested for the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) by Thunderbird Archeological Associates, Inc. (TAA), in September 1996. The area is on the north side of Wilmington, New Castle County, and is located northwest of the intersection of Route 202 (Concord Pike) and Augustine Cutoff at the edge of the Alapocas and Alapocas II subdivisions (Figures 1 and 2). The area examined measured approximately 100 by 200 feet, and was investigated using a combination of backhoe and shovel trenches (Figure 3). Plates 1 and 2 show views of the area tested.

Background

The possibility of the presence of a Civil War cemetery along Alapocas Cutoff first came to the attention of officials in County Planning and DelDOT in 1990, after a Wilmington citizen, Mr. Joseph M. Brumbley, Sr., contacted the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. After his December 1989 call, he sent a follow up letter to the Bureau in 1990, in which he described the specific location as the grove of trees west of the intersection of Concord Pike and Augustine Cutoff. The burials were said to be those of dead prisoners of war who had been held at Fort Delaware.

Other pertinent correspondence includes a 1990 letter to Mr. Brumbley from the Manuscript Librarian, Ms. Cooper, at the historical Society of Delaware in Wilmington, whose research indicated that the prisoners were buried at Finn's Point in New Jersey. Ms. Cooper was unable to locate references to other burial sites. A 1993 letter from Mr. Jackson of the Fort Delaware Society listed three references to Civil War encampments along Concord Pike, but did not mention any burial locations. Copies of these letters are included as Appendix I.

According to Dr. Cara Blume (personal communication 1996), Delaware State Park archeologist, the prisoners who died at Fort Delaware were buried in individual coffins. If the burial could not take place right away, a place was available to store the deceased. She had not heard of burials at any place other than at the Fort or at Finn's Point.

Methodology

The search for grave remains was made by excavating trenches using a backhoe and/or shovels. Because the area was wooded, the trenches were placed at various angles between the trees, avoiding the larger trees. These trenches were excavated to subsoil, where stains and texture changes indicating intrusive activity were generally visible. The trenches were scraped with shovels and trowels in order to carefully examine the soil for grave stains. A plan map and soil profile were drawn for each trench, and soil colors were recorded using the Munsell Color Charts. Representative soil profiles are shown in Figure 4. Each trench was photographed, and representative photographs of the area were also taken. The location of the trenches were mapped using a total electronic transit station.

Results

The area tested for grave stains measured approximately 200 feet along the north side of Augustine Cutoff and up to 100 feet from the edge of the current roadway. The woods beyond this had large areas bedrock outcropping from the surface of the ground and was

not tested. The area adjacent to the roadway has had a gas line installed and was avoided. Several piles of rock were visible on the surface; there were probably field clearing piles. None was articulated and, although the linear arrangement suggests a collapsed stone wall, the line was irregular and had gaps where there was no stone. A few of the rocks were very large, and it is possible that some of these were excavated from surrounding lots or roadways and disposed of on this site.

Nineteen trenches of various sizes were excavated in as many locations as possible within the wooded area and in an open area on the east edge of the woods (Figure 3).

Trenches 1 and 5, in the western part of the study area, revealed a large area of fill soil that may have been dumped here from another location, as suggested by its clayey texture and difference in color from the soils at this site. In Trench 5, there appeared to be an area that was dug and left open for some time: an organic band developed on the underlying soil (Plates 3 and 4). This underlying soil appears to be an undisturbed, old B horizon soil. The original A horizon and upper B horizon only appeared in the northern part of Trench 5 and western part of Trench 1. Most of Trench 1 showed a natural soil profile (i. e., an Ap horizon over a B subsoil horizon), but had been disturbed by burrowing rodents. There was some bedrock in the base of the trench, and some modern bottle glass was noted in the plowzone. Artifacts recovered from the clayey fill in Trench 5 were made up of post-1930 bottle glass, and some plastic was noted near the surface in that fill.

Trenches 2, 3, 4, and 16, also at the western end of the study area, showed essentially undisturbed soil profiles (Plates 5 and 6), except for some rodent burrow and tree root disturbance. Some modern bottle glass (liquor bottle fragments) was noted in Trench 2, and pieces of a stoneware crock and amber bottle glass were found in Trench 3. A 2.5 foot square dug in an open space adjacent to Trench 16 showed a small dump of charcoal and ash within the plowzone, which yielded one post-1889 bottle fragment and a cut nail. Some bedrock was noted at the base of the plowzone in these trenches. The bedrock consisted of large rocks and boulders that were well embedded in the B horizon soil.

Trench 19, also in the western part, and Trench 9 (Plate 7), in the central part, were closer to the Augustine Cutoff, and showed some fill associated with work on or along the roadway. The fill soil was mottled and hard packed, and an A horizon had begun to develop at the surface. A buried A horizon 0.3-0.4 feet deep was found below this fill. It, too, may have developed on disturbed soil, since it was extremely compact and contained saprolite. Below this was an old, undisturbed B horizon soil with saprolite and rock.

Trenches 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17 and 18 were excavated in the center of the area. Rodent burrowing disturbances and ash dumps were found in some of these trenches. The ash dumps were confined to the surface and plowzone in Trenches 7 and 11. In Trench 7, the dump produced fragments of a cobalt bottle and a piece of brick. A similar area in Trench 11 produced fragments of cloth, a coke bottle and some beer cans. Modern trash was noted on the surface and in the plowzone of some the trenches. Some trenches, particularly Trenches 7, 8, 17 and 18, showed extensive areas of bedrock at the base of the plowzone (Plate 8). Where bedrock was not encountered, the trenches showed intact B horizon soils underlying the plowzone.

Trenches 13, 14 and 15 were excavated outside of the woods at the eastern end of the study area. All of these trenches showed a great deal of soil disturbance. Trench 14 was closest to the Augustine Cutoff and had similar soils to Trenches 9 and 19, with extremely compact fill. Excavation for the placement of a utility pole nearby may have added to the disturbance of the area. Trenches 13 and 15 show various areas of fill under the Ao horizon or at the surface, including an asphalt dump. In Trench 15, the trench ended on

what is probably a saprolitic B horizon. In Trench 13, the fill was deeper and compact and subsoil could not be reached. These trenches were only excavated to a shallow depth, although shovel tests were dug in locations within them to see if intact soil could be found. These shovel tests revealed dense, compact fill that could not be excavated by hand, or fill overlying saprolitic B horizon soils, with no intact A horizons. The area was probably disturbed as a result of use as a construction entrance for the Alapocas II subdivision. The paved road in the subdivision ends at a cul-de-sac nearby. Between Trench 13 and the end of the cul-de-sac is a berm of earth planted with pine trees.

Summary and Recommendations

Excavation of 19 trenches within the wooded area that was said to contain a Civil War burial site failed to show any evidence of individual or mass grave sites. Much of the area along Augustine Cutoff was disturbed from construction of the road or from the installation of gas lines and utility poles. The eastern area had been disturbed in connection with the building at Alapocas II subdivision. In the remainder of the area, the quantity of bedrock seems to preclude the use of the area as a burial ground. Certainly, the rock in many of the trenches was embedded in B horizon soil and had not been moved. Where extensive areas of B horizon soil could be seen, no disturbances resembling burial pits or graves were found. The only subplowzone disturbances found were rodent burrows; these often had open holes at the ground surface. North of the area where most of the trenches were placed, bedrock outcrops were noted on the surface. The construction of a driveway by a house in the Alapocas II subdivision also formed part of the northern boundary of the potential burial area.

After examining the test excavations in this area, it seems extremely unlikely that the area had ever been used as a burial ground. Documentary evidence for such is also lacking. The test excavations yielded no significant cultural materials to indicate any kind of archeological site is present.

No further work is recommended for this tract of land.

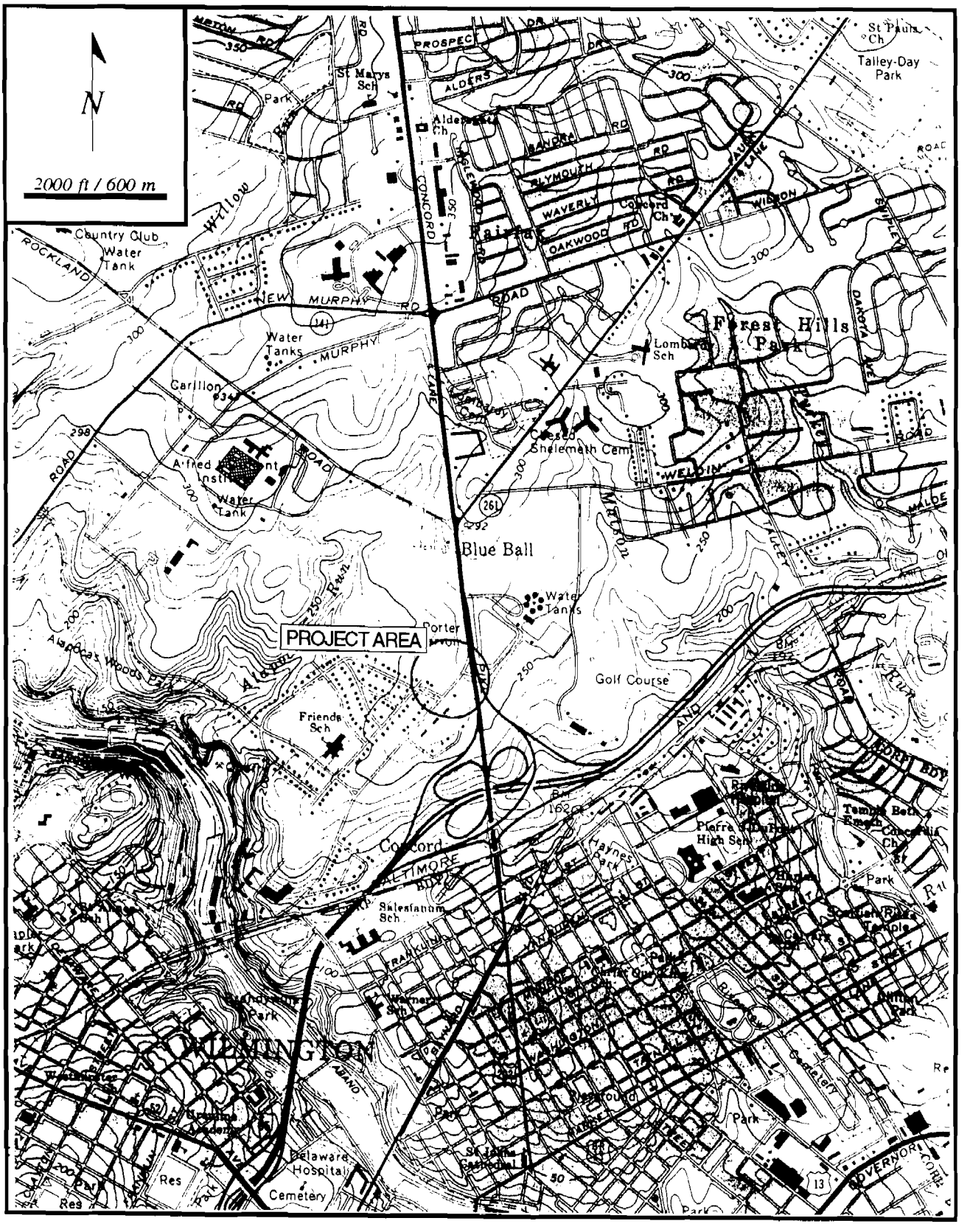

FIGURE 1
Portion of the USGS Wilmington North, DE-PA 7.5' topographic map showing the location of the project area

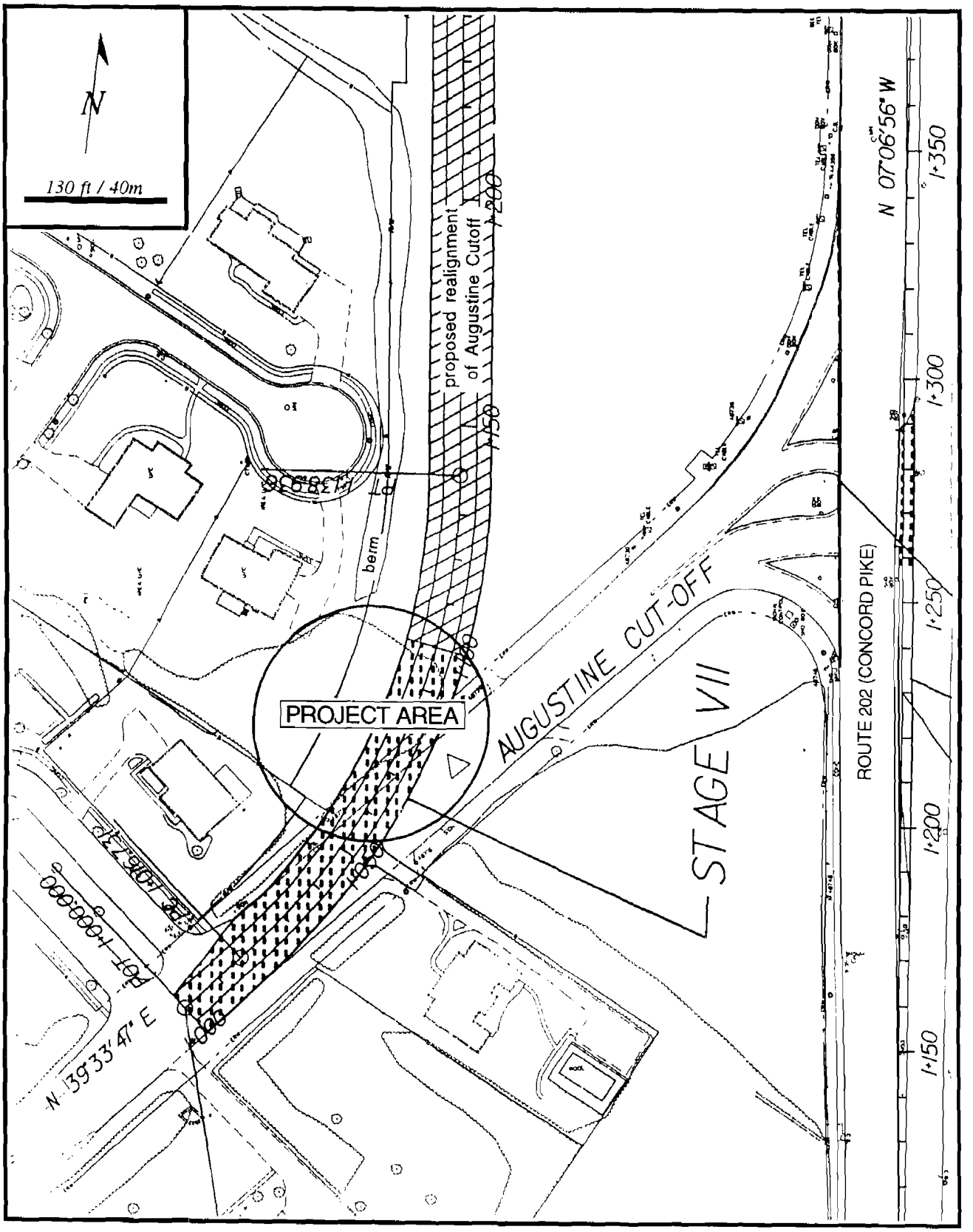

FIGURE 2
Portion of the DelDOT project map showing the realignment of Augustine Cutoff and the location of the project area

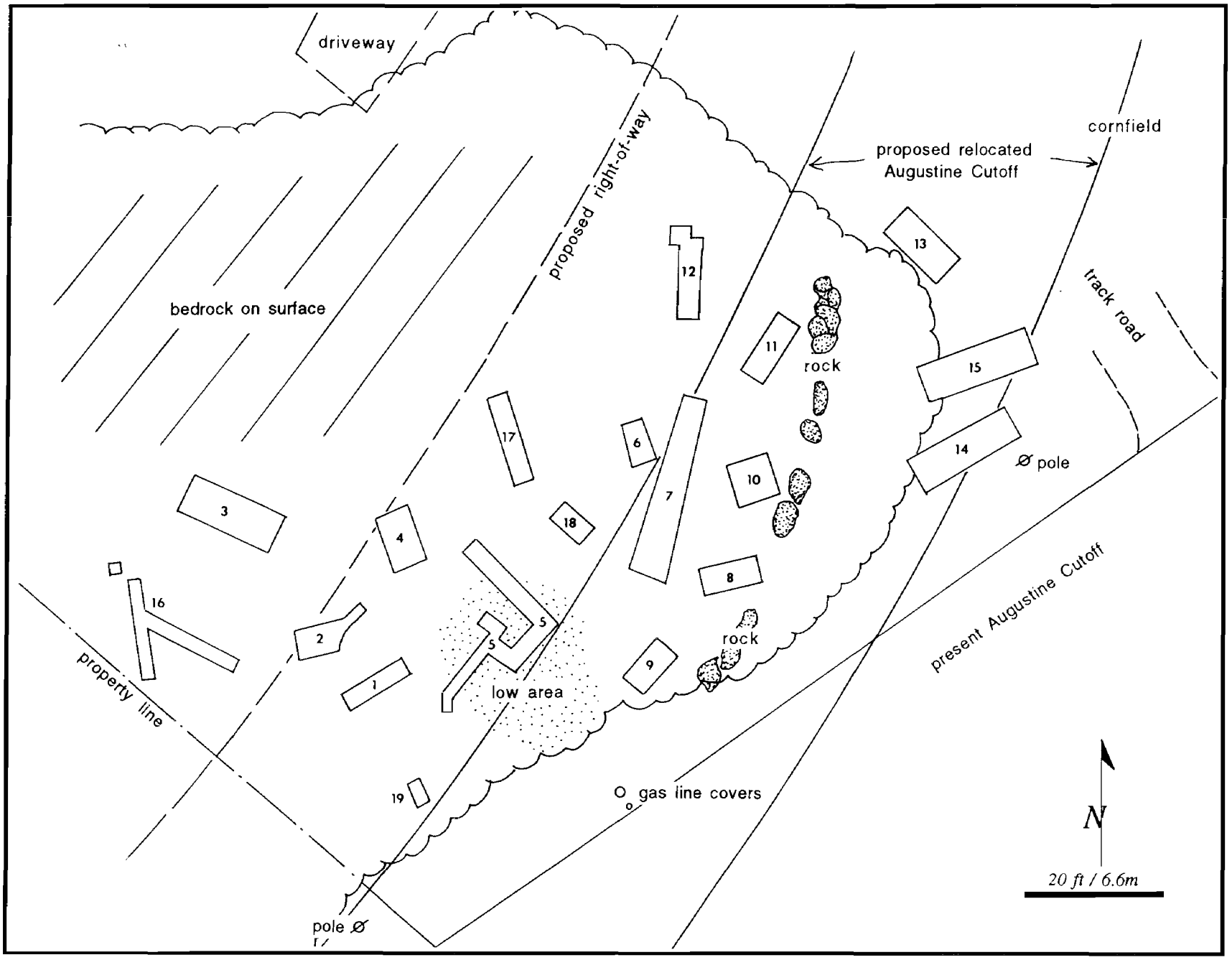

FIGURE 3
Plan map of the project area showing location of trenches

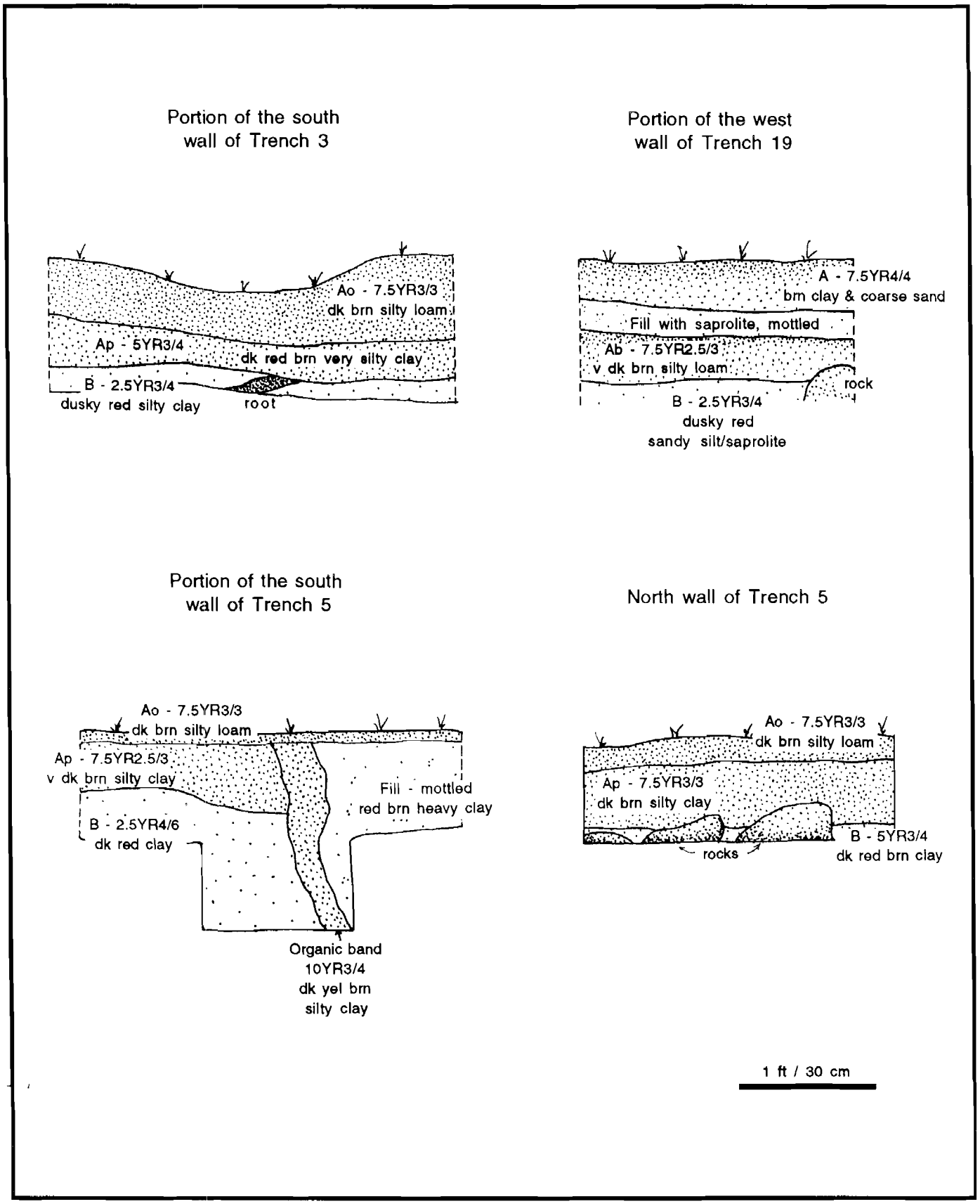

FIGURE 4
Representative soil profiles

PLATE 1
View of wooded area, facing northeast

PLATE 2
View of Trenches 13-15, facing north

PLATE 3
Portion of Trench 5, facing south

PLATE 4
Clay fill in Trench 5 (left side of trench)

PLATE 5
Trench 4, west wall profile

PLATE 6
Trench 16, south wall profile

PLATE 7
Trench 9 showing fill soil and rock

PLATE 8
Trench 7, facing south

APPENDIX I
CORRESPONDENCE

RECEIVED

JAN 11 1990

Archaeology & Historic Preservation

316 Grandview Ave.
Gordon Heights
Wilmington, DE 19809
Phone: 1-302-764-7295
January 8, 1990

RECEIVED

MAR 30 1990

NEW CASTLE COUNTY
DEPT. OF PLANNING

Faye Stocum
Bureau of Archeological & Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 1401
15 The Green
Dover, DE 19903

Dear Friend:

In a letter from Mr. James H. Harbison concerning the subject of this letter he suggested that I contact your office. Since my conversation with him I have been trying to track down the story of the Confederate Cemetery on Augustine Cut-off and have only succeeded in gathering the following:

> The first I ever heard of this cemetery was from a friend and associate named Albert Mayer who, in turn, received it from a neighbor named Irvin Tyle. Mr. Tyle has been dead for twenty years. The next time the story was told it came from the captain of a rifle team I am a member of: *The Delaware Blues*, a black powder group shooting under the auspices of the North-South Skirmish Association. The team captain, Cuthbert G. Gerow III, got the story from his father who is a charter member of the Fort Delaware Society. Mr. Gerow, Sr. tells a story concerning a year, perhaps 1863 or 1864, when the Delaware River froze over to a degree that deceased Confederate soldiers could not be transported across the river to the now National Cemetery at Finn's Point, Salem County, New Jersey. As you probably know, Fort Delaware is popularly known as "the Andersonville of the North", having had a large number of prisoners die while incarcerated there. Apparently it was possible to get across the narrower channel to the Delaware side of the river and as a result burials took place for a period of time during that winter in the neighborhood of Wilmington. It is quite likely that the land upon which the cemetery is located was made available to the Union by a member of the DuPont family who still own the surrounding real estate. There were several members of that family who were high ranking officers in the Union Army as well as Admiral Samuel DuPont of the Navy. At the present time that little one acre, wooded lot is included (on the county tax maps) in the Alfred I. DuPont Trust under the administration of the Ball Family. The cemetery is located on the northwest side of a road called the Augustine Cut-off and is one tenth of a mile west of the intersection of that road with U.S. Route 202 or, as we know it, Concord Pike.

Around the middle of this past December an article appeared in our local paper, *The News Journal*, showing minor modifications to an earlier

plan for an alternate and much improved version of U.S. Route 202 and showing this brand new four lane major artery with an exit ramp onto Augustine Cut-off; crossing the secondary road within the narrow limits of that one tenth of a mile or, if you will, 528 feet. Unless I miss my guess, there isn't any way that can happen without destroying the one acre grove of trees that is thought to be a Confederate graveyard. Attached you will find a map I have copied and hope it will help.

Looking forward to further communication I am...

Sincerely Yours,

Joseph M. Brumbley, Sr.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE
505 Market Street Mall Wilmington, Delaware 19801 302-655-7161

April 4, 1990

Joseph M. Brumbley, Sr.
316 Grandview Avenue
Wilmington, Delaware 19809

Dear Mr. Brumbley:

As you requested, I have checked our sources for information on whether dead prisoners from Fort Delaware were buried by the Augustine Cut-off. Our sources do not show that any prisoners were buried at any location except the Finn's Point Cemetery, with the exception of some who were buried on Pea Patch Island or were sent home for burial.

If, however, you would like to pursue further in-depth research on this question to definitively prove or disprove the legend, I can offer several suggestions. First, you might want to search the newspapers for that time period. Another possibility is to check in the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, which is well-indexed. Both of these sources are in our library, but because our staff is small we cannot do the research for you.

A third possibility is the records of the du Pont family, available at the Hagley Library.

I'm still working on your manuscript, and I shall return it to you with my comments and evaluation.

Sincerely,

Constance J. Cooper

Constance J. Cooper, Ph.D.
Manuscript Librarian

CJC/akb

Founded in 1864 as a private, nonprofit organization, The Historical Society of Delaware operates a major research library, the Old Town Hall Museum and Willingtown Square in Wilmington and the George Read II House and Garden in New Castle.

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February 4, 1993

William P. Jackson
217 Edgewood Road
Alapocas
Wilmington, DE, 19803

Dear Mr. Jackson,

This will acknowledge receipt by the Fort Delaware Society of your gift of an album of pictures and separate mounted slides of those pictures. The pictures are all Fort Delaware scenes and were taken by you during a visit to Fort Delaware in September, 1991.

Please excuse our delay in acknowledging your gift. It was reported at the January meeting of the Board of Directors.

On behalf of the membership and Board of Directors of the Fort Delaware Society,I thank you for this gift. The pictures are a useful reference showing how the Fort appeared at a particular time.

I understand you are still researching the possibility of a military cemetery being located near Alapocas.

"Sharf's History of Delaware" on Page 371 of Volume No. 1 describes the 8th Regiment Volunteer Infantry, one year men, whose rendezvous was at Camp Smithers on the Concord Pike in September, 1864. This group stayed there about one month. Sharf does not say exactly where Camp Smithers was located.

On the same page, Sharf notes the First Delaware Cavalry was at Camp Smithers during the fall and winter, 1862-1863, leaving in February, 1863.

On the next page, Sharf states that the First Delaware Battery, Field Artillery, was in camp at Weldens Woods near Blue Ball Inn from August 21, 1862, to December 20, 1862.

A search of newspaper files from that time might give more

information about the camps.

Also, I was told by Emerson Wilson that during Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania in June, 1863, the two field cannon now at Fort Delaware were taken by the home guard to a defense position on the Concord Pike. I do not know the exact location of that defense position, but I suspect it was in the area near Porter Reservoir.

I hope this information may be of some use to you in your research.

Very truly yours,

William E. Craven

William E. Craven
Chairman of the Board
Fort Delaware Society

APPENDIX II
ARTIFACT INVENTORY

Augustine Cutoff Inventory (96-26)

Trench 3, Ap

Ceramics

11 redware sherds, dark brown/black exterior glaze, brown interior glaze

1 redware sherd, brown interior glaze, exterior unglazed

Glass

1 amber cylindrical bottle fragment, chilled iron mold (1880-1930)

Trench 5, heavy clay fill

Glass

2 clear cylindrical bottle or jar fragments, automatic bottle machine (post 1930)

1 Seven-up green cylindrical beer or soda bottle fragment, automatic bottle machine (post 1933)

Trench 7, ash dump

Glass

6 cobalt rectangular 2 oz. external medicine bottle fragments, single banded collared lip, chilled iron mold (1906-1930)

Miscellaneous

1 brick fragment

Trench 16 (2.5' square), ash dump

Glass

1 very pale green cylindrical bottle fragments, chilled iron mold/automatic bottle machine (post 1880)

Metal

1 cut nail fragment (post 1790)