

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LEBANON, KENT COUNTY, lies at the confluence of Tidbury Branch and St. Jones River. The Delaware Department of Transportation proposes to rebuild Bridge 356a over Tidbury and to straighten a curve in Road 356a (FIGURE 1). The project area is rich in historic and prehistoric sites. Great Geneva, near the north end of the causeway on Route 10, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. High ground at both ends of the bridge approach has long been known to contain prehistoric sites that may be potentially eligible for the Register. A cannery, an ironworks, a nailery, and a sawmill are known to have stood in or near the right-of-way. At the south end of the causeway, on the hill, is a known cemetery site, from which human remains were recovered 62 years ago.

Purpose and location of the project

Road 356a connects Route 10 at Wildcat with Road 357 at Lebanon. Its northern half consists of a bridge and causeway over Tidbury Branch and adjoining tidal marsh. The bridge and causeway originally were built in about 1793 as a mill dam. The present two-span steel-encased stringer structure was built after 1925; it is 35 feet long and 16.5 feet wide, with two fifteen-foot spans on concrete abutment with a reinforced concrete center pier. Because of its deteriorating condition, the bridge was downgraded to an eight-ton load limit in October 1983.

At both ends, the road crosses well-drained Sassafras soils, but much of the right-of-way is built on tidal marsh and associated sandy beaches. Sassafras soils adjacent to tidal waterways have been favorite locations for Delaware townsites and landings since earliest Colonial times. Since the underlying sand and gravel deposits are commercially valuable, much of the project area has been dug away for borrow pits. The river here has always been navigable, especially below the mouth of Tidbury Branch, which adds a strong perennial flow.

South of the causeway, the road follows the high ground at the base of a steep hill, much of which has been dug away to provide fill for the ever-sinking causeways over the Tidbury and St. Jones marshes. Near the south end of Road 356a is a footbridge, Bridge 357a, that was brought from Denton, Maryland, to replace a highway swing bridge that connected Lebanon with Jones Neck.

The Department of Transportation proposes to replace the one-lane bridge over Tidbury Branch with a wider span, and to improve the causeway. A curve south of the causeway is to be removed. Straightening the curve will require considerable excavation, but the work on the causeway will be built atop existing structures. The new bridge will involve excavation of the causeway structure, since it is to be larger than the present span.

The authors were engaged in February 1988 by the Department to conduct Phase 1 cultural resource investigations in the project area. Fieldwork continued through July 1988. Tasks included identification of the cemetery; recording of standing structures; tests north of Tidbury Branch; subsurface tests around the bridge structure; and tests in areas to be disturbed by relocation of the roadway.

Research methods and objectives

In order to comply with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Department of Transportation engaged the authors to conduct Phase I investigations in the project area. The purpose of such investigations is to identify all cultural resources that may be affected by the project. After the Phase I study was completed, a Phase II study was conducted in selected areas. A Phase II investigation is intended to determine if the identified resources are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Because the site has played a major role in Delaware civil and industrial history, the authors' approach was primarily historical. Site locations were determined by reference to the documents; subsurface tests were sunk into the locations indicated by the documents. Random testing strategies were judged to be inappropriate.

Most of today's property boundaries (FIGURE 2) were established during the nineteenth century, when Lebanon was an important local port. As a starting point, the authors used several extremely accurate surveys recorded in 1809, 1813, and 1822, which were overlain on modern maps (FIGURE 3). Investigations concentrated on the major periods in Lebanon's history, which were expressed materially as the remains of mills built after a 1793 legislative act, the cannery built around 1870, and the steamboat service that continued into the present century. The investigation was subdivided to reflect these historical periods. Although some prehistoric objects were found throughout the testing, the known prehistoric sites will not be impacted by the proposed project.

Can-making waste in large quantities had been observed and collected by Dr. E. D. Bryan of Dover in the course of his research into the history of the Delaware canning industry. This waste could have been created during only twelve seasons that the Lebanon cannery operated, a period when the infant canning technology was changing. Cannery archaeology has not generated a large literature to date, but can manufacture is in many ways analogous to potting, and the waste dump should provide information similar to that commonly retrieved from potters' waster dumps. As in pottery dumps, a tightly-dated deposit created during a period of change can be particularly valuable to scholars of the technology in question. A detailed discussion of the cannery waste will be found in Appendix 3.

Reports of a cemetery on the edge of the project area were investigated, with equivocal results. The probable location of the cemetery was identified, a short distance outside the project area. The cemetery's location was identified by a very old pencil note on a copy of Beers' *Atlas* (FIGURE 4) and by recollections of an eyewitness who saw graves being disturbed 62 years ago. Because the Department wished to avoid the cemetery, the face of the gravel pit was scraped to a depth of six feet, looking for grave shafts or burials.

Standing structures and known cultural resources

Along the river in the project area are the remains of three nineteenth-century buildings and numerous pilings, remnants of Lebanon's days as a steamboat port. These structures were identified and photographed (PLATES 2-14).

The project area is represented by several entries in the state Cultural Resource Survey files. Well-drained fields around Lebanon (7K-C-14, 22) have long been known to collectors as a source of prehistoric artifacts. The steamboat company buildings (K-3255) and some small houses facing Route 10 (K-3335) have been surveyed but not nominated to the Register. The survey also includes the modern duplex apartment (K-3265) in the south end of the project area, which was built after 1960. Bridge 356a (K-5676) of *circa* 1925 was included in the University of Delaware bridge survey in 1984.

Wildcat Manor (K-119) was considered by the State Review Board for nomination to the National Register in 1972. The other Hunn family seat, now known as Great Geneva (K-150), was listed in the Register with one acre of surrounding ground on May 26, 1973. Residents of these two houses have controlled much of the project area since early settlement times.

The surviving steamboat company buildings (K-3255) and a trapper's dwelling, are east of the proposed highway construction. All are dilapidated and near the point of collapse. A modern shed stands in the mill seat property (PLATE 8). Next to it is a pile of rubble that once was a residence built early in the present century. Immediately to the north of the rubble is a building with no back wall that until recently still bore a sign identifying it as the office of the Lebanon steamboat line. It is variously known as the ladies' waiting room and as the scale house (PLATES 5 - 6). A brick scale platform may still be seen in front of it. A short distance to the north is the skeleton of a timber-framed building (PLATE 7) that was part of the steamboat company warehouse; it formerly stood on a wharf over the river. On the opposite side of the road is a one-room float house with a round roof. The barge on which it stood has long since rotted away, but the abandoned building remains on makeshift footings (PLATES 2-4). Local informants recall that the occupants of this building were trappers who dealt in muskrats, turtles, and other products of the marshes.

Other historic structures are visible only at low tide. Near the foot bridge are the pilings on which the existing steamboat company warehouse once stood. Farther north, next to the float house, are two sets of timber pilings that formerly supported wharves for the granaries on the Samuel Mifflin and James Lord tracts (PLATES 11-13). Farther north, near the present mouth of Tidbury Branch, is a vertical planked structure with several compartments that appears to have been a pool or holding tank for live aquatic creatures (PLATE 12).

The present Tidbury Branch bridge (K-5676) has been inserted into the eighteenth-century Hunn dam, now known as the causeway. A short distance downstream from the bridge, a substantial timber and earth fill structure, eighteen feet wide, is exposed at low tide (PLATE 14). This structure lies on the alignment of the eighteenth-century causeway to the "new" landing that later became Lebanon. Local tradition describes this structure as the Hunn nail factory of *circa* 1793. Farther out, next to the old river channel, are several parallel bulkheads built of upright planks

The Float House



Plate 2 (above) The end of the float house, from the west



Plate 3 (right, above) Interior of the float house, looking east

Plate 4 (right, below) View of the float house from the south



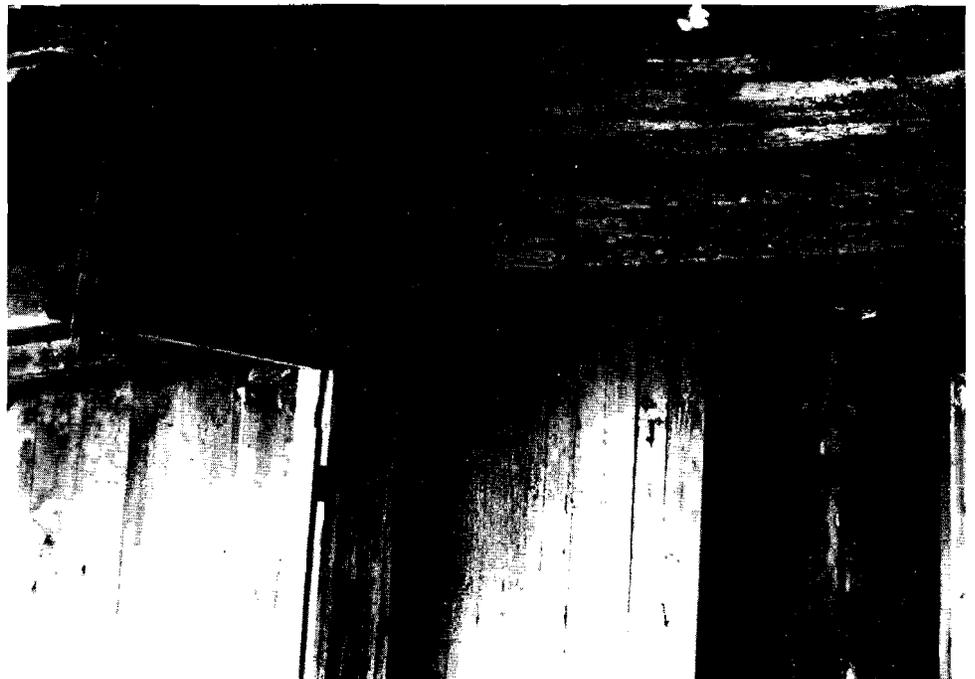


The Scale
House

Plate 5 (above) Rear of the ladies' waiting room or scale house building.

Plate 6 (below) Detail of the interior tongue-and-groove board trim on the walls and ceiling in the waiting room, with a portion of the coarser trim in the room behind

Scale house



Ruins



Plate 7 (left) Rear view of the warehouse building now located in the former gravel pit.

Plate 8 (below) Rear view of the modern shed that occupies the probable site of the Hunn bloomery forge. In the background is a pile of rubble, the remains of a residential building that stood on the steamboat company lot.





Plate 9 (above) View of the modern duplex apartment house, looking northward in the direction of the cannery site.

Plate 10 (below) Looking northward at high tide from the footbridge toward Wildcat, in the far background, with Road 356a to the left.



Wharf Remains



Plate 11 (Left)
View northward along the
St. Jones shore of the Samuel
Mifflin tract, with the timbers
of the granary wharf exposed
at extreme low tide

Plate 12 (below) Tank-like structure at
the mouth of Tidbury Branch,
visible in the view from the Samuel
Mifflin wharf, above





Plate 13 (above) Lord's wharf, later the steamboat company's, from the north

Plate 14 (below) Exposed timber-cribbed earthen structure immediately downstream from the present Tidbury Branch bridge, looking eastward

