

## DelDOT ARCHAEOLOGY

### The Locust Grove Site

Archaeological excavations were conducted at the Locust Grove Site, located about a mile west of Odessa, in New Castle County, Delaware. This work, carried out by Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., for the Delaware Department of Transportation, was undertaken because the site lay in the path of the proposed State Route 1 (SR 1), a new limited-access highway designed to carry traffic from Wilmington to the Atlantic Ocean beaches.

The site surrounds Locust Grove, a house located on the north side of Middletown Road, that formed the domestic center of a 300-acre farm during the nineteenth century. The Locust Grove property was first developed during the mid-eighteenth century by Robert Meldrum and was acquired in 1801 by Samuel Pennington, Sr., whose family owned the property until 1939. The Penningtons were a well-to-do family whose farm (first called "Meldrum Farm" and, later, "Locust Grove") prospered during the nineteenth century. Like many of their neighbors, the Penningtons raised a variety of crops and livestock for their own use as well as for the market, and participated in the peach boom of the 1870s.

The house at Locust Grove was built in stages and consisted of two main sections. The earliest portion of the house, built in the Greek Revival style, was constructed by Samuel Pennington, Jr., between 1830 and 1850. It was situated perpendicular to Middletown Road and was a relatively modest two-story structure with classically-inspired detailing. The second section was added during the 1870s while Franklin Pennington, Samuel Jr.'s son, was living and farming at Locust Grove as a tenant. It was three stories high and built in the then-popular Second Empire style, with the characteristic mansard roof and bay windows. Construction of the new addition marked a transition in the farmstead's appearance and reflected the Penningtons' economic and social success. The house now looked across a landscaped yard toward Middletown Road, 150 feet to the south.

Evidence of the nineteenth-century landscaping was documented during the archaeological excavations. Testing had shown that the front and west side yards were relatively undisturbed, so the investigations focused on these portions of the property. Excavations in the front yard uncovered several layers of soil, together with a number of small trash-filled pits, that appear to have been created at about the time the Second Empire section of the house was built. One such layer contained, aside from household refuse, large amounts of brick and other demolition rubble that may have come from a chimney or other structure that was dismantled when the Penningtons constructed the new front portion of the house. Beneath the rubble was an old ground surface contemporary with the occupation of Locust Grove's earlier Greek Revival section, when this part of the property had been the side yard of the house. The fragments of ceramics, glass, and bone recovered from this soil layer suggested that household refuse had been simply tossed into the yard. Excavations in the west side yard revealed another sequence of landscaping strata and trash deposits from the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The artifacts provide some sense of the types of objects with which the occupants of Locust Grove surrounded themselves during the nineteenth century. Everyday meals were eaten from plates with shell-edge decoration.

Tea or coffee was consumed from handpainted or sponge-decorated cups, while other beverages were drunk from glass tumblers. More formal occasions were probably marked by the use of dinner and teawares decorated with a variety of transfer-print patterns, while in the kitchen, food was stored and prepared in glazed redware vessels.

The Locust Grove households also acquired, used, and discarded a variety of personal, clothing, furnishings, tobacco, and architectural items. Generally speaking, these objects are typical of nineteenth-century rural domestic assemblages, and it is evident that the Locust Grove households took advantage of new consumer goods as they became available. Overall, the household objects suggest refined if not opulent furnishings. Several jardinières used to hold flowerpots or planters (possibly used in the parlor/family room), glass bowls, a metal and glass drawer pull, and a brass-tipped fireplace poker all hint at the manner in which the house was furnished during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and point to well-to-do Victorian tastes.

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