6. Phase II Evaluation and Assessment of Impact at Rockland

THE ROCKLAND PAPER MILL was destroyed as an industrial artifact when the building was gutted and filled with housing units. Residential adaptation completely removed the mill, leaving only the shell of the building in which the most recent paper mill had been located. Since the main archæological and historical feature of the community was unalterably destroyed, the integrity of the Rockland district is seriously compromised.

Near-total loss of integrity might be a convincing reason to remove Rockland from the National Register, at least in terms of its industrial significance. There are, however, areas of architectural or æsthetic significance, distinct from the mill property's past or potential contributions to archæological or historical knowledge.

In particular, there is reason to believe that the village might have extraordinary National Register value under criterion D, which generally is reserved for archæological sites that have contributed, or might be expected to contribute to our knowledge of the past.

Outside the mill itself are the ancillary features of the mill community that might add as much to knowledge as the mill itself (PLATE 4, BELOW). Like the other mill seats along the Brandywine, Rockland still contains some of its worker housing, including some unusual frame rowhouses along the old county road up the Brandywine.

The area of the intersection improvement will cross the sites of three known structures: two

Plate 4 Stone house located just above the project right-of-way, formerly associated with the mill

four-unit stone rowhouse buildings and a frame store. These buildings can easily be located on the historic maps, with some accuracy. On the ground their locations are not so easily discerned, since the whole area was covered with clean fill after the buildings were demolished (FIGURE 6). When the 1918 map (FIGURE 7) was compared to existing conditions, it was possible to pinpoint historical features that are known to have existed.

In the vicinity of the rowhouse units, Mount Lebanon Run is contained between stone walls. The ground is covered with building debris including brick and stone masonry fragments and wall sections. One part of a masonry foundation and the remains of a springhouse are visible in the underbrush.

The store site has been cleared and graded, leaving no surface indications. Along Rockland Road, the apparent depth of fill is as much as ten feet in places. In the store site is a large Wilmington water department underground complex of meters and other equipment, marked on the surface by three manholes. Informants identified the manholes as occupying the site of the store, which is confirmed by the map.

The upper part of the project area has been deeply filled to provide a level yard for a house served by the private drive at the top of the sketch map, Figure 6. This house, shown in Plate 4, while not in the project area, will be impacted visually by the project. A house appears on this location in the 1868 map but not in the 1849 map, which gives a good bracket for the construction date of the house.

TEST TRENCHES

In order to assess the integrity, for purposes of determining archæological potential, a series of three machine-cut trenches were sunk into the site. The Gradall machine was chosen over the more traditional hand tools because it was known that the site had been covered with a heavy layer of clean fill. The former locations of the three principal historic buildings had been accurately established from historical documents (FIGURE 7).

Test objectives were limited to the Phase II purpose of determining the extent and integrity of the resource, which was known both from the documents and field observation. No features would be opened.

The first of these trenches, labelled Test 1 on Figure 8, was sunk into the area occupied by the lower row of four houses. Fill consisted largely of basketball-sized rocks, some with mortar still adhering, in a matrix of brown soil. These were assumed to be parts of the walls. Two layers of such rubble were separated by a layer of yellow sandy fill. Toward the road, large boulders appeared to be part of a demolished wall. Because of the nearness of sewer and water lines, it was deemed unwise to further explore these boulders.

The rubble ended near the present water table on a yellow sandy subsoil at the water table nine feet below current grade. Ceramics from the lower levels of the rubble (Island Field accession 90/56/1) are consistent with a building erected in 1802 and occupied until 1960. They include black-glazed red earthenware, green shell-edged pearlware, hand-decorated white earthenwares, transfer-printed white earthenwares, and ironstone.

Because the fill was extremely unstable, it was necessary to confine recordation to sketches, rather than tightly measured and controlled profiles. Water was encountered at the bottom, on the apparent natural sand level.

Informants reported that the houses had English basements, which would have placed their lowest elevation above the bottom of the rubble.

This trench confirmed the report that the demolition contractor, at least in this area, had diligently obliterated the houses, removing all intact masonry from the area of this test.

At the opposite side of the project area, on the site of the store and post office, a second trench was opened. Informants reported that the building was a lightweight frame structure, which the contractor had completely removed.

Plate 5

Excavating Test 2 with a Gradall

Test 2 was a machine-cut trench into the store site (PLATE 5). At a depth of five feet eight inches, an apparent natural clay layer was reached, which was tested another foot and a half, in order to confirm that it was natural. The bottom layer, resting on this clay, consisted of blacktop pavement and other very recent building debris. Between this test trench and the roads the ground has been further disturbed by extensive utility improvements, probably obliterating all meaningful traces of the store building.

It can therefore be concluded that the area designated as "cleared and graded" on figure 5 is so disturbed that it possesses no integrity. To the east, in the scrub woodland, the picture is very different. The demolition contractor had not been so diligent in removing the upper row of four houses.

At the top of the rowhouse unit stands the ruin of a springhouse (PLATE 6), which was built on a large natural outcrop. Looking down from the springhouse, a natural channel is apparent, flowing westward toward Rockland Road. This channel is covered over with rubble and trash, but it proved to be still very active.

North of the spring is a level space, extending sixty feet back almost to Rockland Run.Two large trees stand on this level platform, indicating that the landform is a feature predating the house demolition of twenty years ago.

At the opposite end of this plateau, alongside the channel, a small fragment or mortared stone wall was visible. When the debris in front of this wall was removed, it proved to be standing forty inches above the muck of the channel leading from the spring.

A dry-laid cross wall, eight feet long, stands athwart the channel, creating a waterfall about three feet high. as the stream steps down.

Plate 6

Remains of the spring house

In the muck of the streambed were several identifiable ceramic artifacts, including slip-decorated red earthenware, printed and painted white earthenwares, and black-glazed red earthenwares. These are consistent with nineteenth-century workers' houseware.

Longtime resident Burl Owens reported that the springhouse had not been used toward the last, since a deep dug well had replaced it.

Since there was a high probability that the channel might contain undisturbed deposits, it was backfilled gently, leaving the wall segment visible above ground for future reference.

No further archæological work is recommended for the area marked "heavily filled and disturbed" on figure 8. The house site, however, definitely warrants appropriate data-recovery treatment. The store site is apparently completely obliterated, and requires no further attention.

This site, especially the filled channel of the spring branch, has high potential for containing intact deposits that could shed light on the lives of nineteenth-century workers.

The state management plan for historical archæological resources, which was issued during this investigation, identifies suburban New Castle County as a threatened area. The theme of technological revolution, 1770-1830, is identified as a context needing attention (DeCunzo and Catts 1990:190).

Considering the investment that has been lavished on preserving fragmentary above-ground mementoes of the industrial period, there should be little difficulty justifying attention to the more substantial and informative remains that lie intact below the surface at Rockland. The village contains some of the earliest and latest occupied factory worker housing in Delaware.

Plate 8

Excavated wall segment, looking northeast

Built in 1802, the first industrial rowhouses at Rockland served their original purpose for more than a century and a half, and can be expected to provide an uninterrupted chronicle of life in a company house for the full span of the industrial revolution in America.

ELIGIBILITY AND EFFECT

The upper row of worker houses retains its archæological integrity, but the lower row has been severely damaged. The wall shown on Plate 8 is part of a stone platform on which stood the upper block of row. It also retained the spring branch.

In the area tested, this drain ran along the foot of the wall from a springhouse, perpetually wetting the soil. Organic remains could be preserved in the wet area.

Investigation of the house site could add to our knowledge of the living conditions of Brandywine workers during the nineteenth century. This particular site is set apart from other worker housing by the possibility of organic preservation in the waterlogged ground along the spring drain.

As an archæological expression of the qualities for which the district was nominated to the Register, the row of worker houses clearly is a contributing district element.

The current plan would have an adverse effect on these remains. If it is impossible to avoid disturbing the ruins, data recovery will be the preferred treatment.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

This project illustrates one of the inherent problems of preservation planning. Sites tend to be departmentalized, even though they might have diverse attributes.

In the normal course of business, an archæological site will be evaluated for eligibility by an archæologist, and a standing structure will be evaluated by an architectural historian. In theory, each consultant or other evaluator should take into account the other disciplines that might be involved.

The program recognizes [on paper at least] that any property might be eligible under more than one criterion, and that all properties should be evaluated against each of the criteria. Academic orientation of the evaluator, however, will skew the evaluation.

In the case of Rockland, the old nomination included the present project area, even though it did not address the archæological aspects of demolished houses.

The most recent re-evaluation eliminated the project area because the historic buildings had been demolished. Yet the present study revealed potentially significant archæological deposits. These deposits, independent of the existing district nomination, qualify the site for the Register.

Unless the archæological potential of a registered site has been recognized in the nomination, it is necessary to re-evaluate the property "from scratch" whenever a cultural resource management report is drafted. In the present instance, both the architectural and archæological dimensions of Rockland were being evaluated concurrently by consultants who reached opposite conclusions regarding worker housing ruins.

This situation gives rise to an effective "dual registration" for every major site, since the archæological dimension is inherent in human activities virtually everywhere.

A "quick fix" for the problem would be for each discipline to write a separate section of each nomination, regardless of the main thrust and the criterion under which the property is being primarily considered. So long as the Federal guidelines require professional qualifications for consultants in particular fields, it follows that a full complement of qualified individuals should consider each property, or the reviewing agencies should coordinate the efforts of diverse experts engaged separately to evaluate a single property.

Until then, cultural resources will be evaluated in the manner of the blind men describing an elephant in the Hindu legend.