PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The Mermaid Tavern Site Complex was originally tested in 1985 during the Phase I and II survey of the proposed road improvements of Delaware Route 7. The site was identified through archival research as the location of a mid-to-late nineteenth-century blacksmith shop and wheelwright shop associated with the Mermaid Tavern, which had functioned as an inn since the early eighteenth century.

The Mermaid Wheelwright Shop site (7NC-D-106C) is located on the southeast corner of the Mermaid-Stoney Batter Road intersection with Limestone Road. Phase I testing at the site consisted of the excavation of six 1-meter test units placed around a two-story frame dwelling (Figure 5). Background research indicated that the existing house, built over the wheelwright shop, was constructed in 1900 by the ancestors of the family that presently owns the Mermaid Tavern. The test units recovered a variety of nineteenth-century artifacts, including whiteware, nails, gray salt-glazed stoneware, a partial horseshoe, bottle and window glass fragments, shell and brick fragments. These were found in the brown silt loam and humus levels, between 0 and 30 cm below ground surface. A trash feature containing coal and ash intermixed with topsoil was located to the north (rear) of the house in Test Unit 7. Phase I and II testing at the wheelwright shop could not be completed in 1985 because the owner withdrew permission for continued investigations. Nevertheless, the excavations revealed that there were some subsurface indications of a site at this location, and additional archaeological investigations were deemed necessary (Catts et al. 1986:72-76).

The Mermaid Blacksmith Shop and Stable site (7NC-D-106B) is located on the east side of Limestone Road, at the northeast corner of the intersection (Figure 6). It is located directly across the street from the Mermaid Tavern, and north of the Wheelwright Shop site. Initial Phase I documentary research indicated that the blacksmith shop was located on this corner by the second decade of the nineteenth century. To locate and identify the structure, four auger probes and two 1-meter test units were excavated at the site. A very dark brown, almost black, organic buried 'A' horizon was identified approximately 18cm below ground surface, and extended to a depth of approximately 25cm (Figure 7). Seven additional 1-meter test units were excavated to determine the extent of the buried deposits and locate any subsurface features. The buried 'A' horizon was located in all of the additional test units, but

FIGURE 5

Phase I Testing at Mermaid Tavern Wheelwright Shop Site

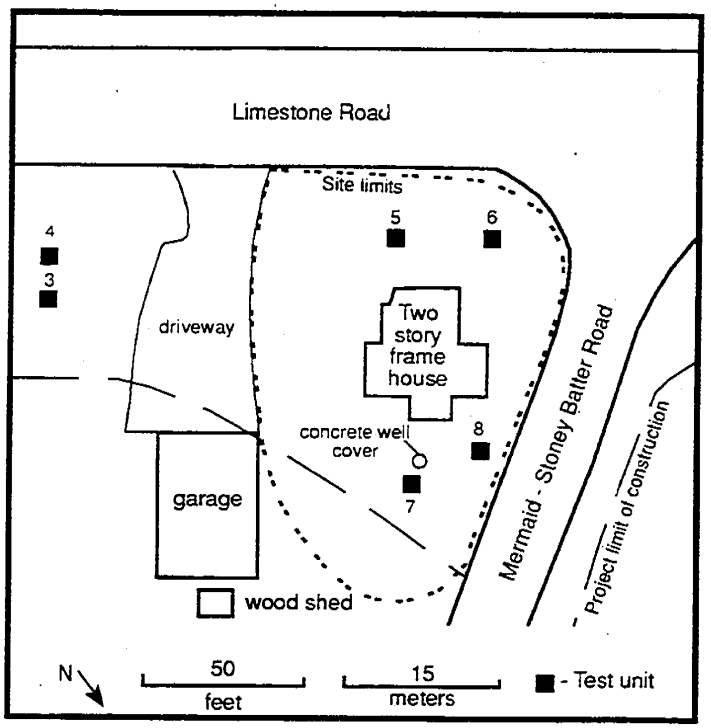
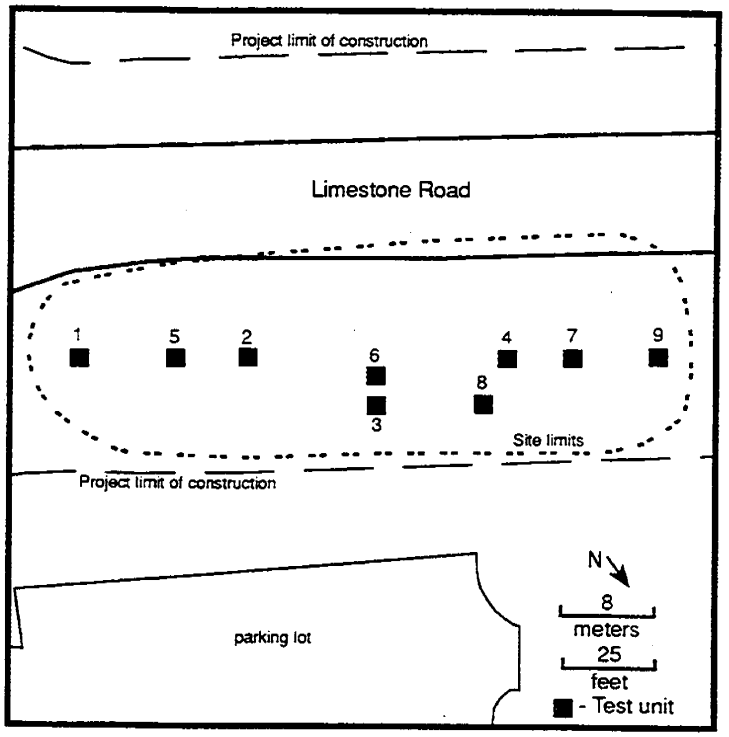


FIGURE 6

Phase I Testing at Mermaid Tavern Blacksmith Shop and Stable Site



no features were encountered. Artifacts recovered include redwares, whitewares, annular pearlwares, nails, metal fragments, window glass and bottle glass, and oyster shell fragments. The highest densities of artifacts were recovered from Test Units 2 and 6. Based on the results of this Phase I and limited Phase II testing, additional archaeological excavations were considered necessary to determine the eligibility of the site for inclusion on the National Register (Catts et al. 1986:157-160).

RESEARCH CONTEXTS

According to the guidelines established by the Delaware Statewide Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan (Ames et al. 1989) and further refined for historical archaeological remains by De Cunzo and Catts (1990), the sites at the Mermaid intersections are situated in the Piedmont zone of Delaware, placing the potential date range for the site in a period spanning from 1730 to the beginning of the twentieth century. The professions represented at the sites, blacksmithing and wheelwrighting, fit best into the