

V. ELIGIBILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION

To assess whether a site is eligible for listing in the NRHP, it is first necessary to identify the type of site and its associated time period. It is also essential to assess the integrity of the site, because for the most part only sites with intact structural and landscape features or intact, unmixed deposits can provide important information about the past. Then the information potential of the site is considered in the light of the research questions developed and pursued in archaeological research, some of which are outlined in state planning documents (Bedell 2002; De Cunzo and Catts 1990). The logic of evaluation for a farm or rural dwelling site therefore proceeds as follows.

- What is the historical association of the site and its primary components?

It is essential to identify the approximate date of a farm or rural dwelling before it can be evaluated, and a notion of the character of the household who lived at the site is also very useful. These questions are answered by a combination of archaeological and documentary data. The artifacts give us the approximate date of the occupation, and a title search can tell us who owned the property at that time and tell us his or her social class. If the owner lived elsewhere, then the occupants were presumably tenants. Documentary research can also help with questions of ethnicity, and whether the site might have been occupied by enslaved workers. The quantity and quality of archival information that is available for a site is also an important consideration for evaluating its significance (Wilson 1990).

- How can the site be characterized with regard to archaeological integrity?

Integrity can be measured in many ways. Bedell (2002) suggested three types of archaeological integrity for plowed historic sites: presence of sealed subsurface features containing datable artifact deposits, presence of structural features that can define the basic layout of the farmstead, and the presence of architectural remains. For some categories of sites, such as an eighteenth-century slave quarter, uncontaminated plowzone deposits might be sufficient evidence of integrity, but for other types, subplowzone features or unplowed deposits are generally considered necessary for NHRP eligibility.

- What research questions can the site answer?

Once the nature of the site has been determined and its integrity assessed, we can proceed to analyze the potential of the site to answer important research questions. These questions might include:

Household economic activity: What was produced on the site, and how did the occupants fit into the broader economy of colonial America?

Consumer behavior: What did the occupants buy, and what were they trying to express through their purchases?

Modernization: Did the occupants live in an up-to-date, vernacular Georgian house, or in a more traditional hall-parlor house? Was the landscape of their farm the rough pattern of the frontier or the ordered layout of a Victorian farm?

Ethnicity: If the occupants of the site were African-American, how is their ethnicity reflected in the material culture associated with each site?

- How does the site compare with others in the region?
The final step in the evaluation of the site is to compare it to other known sites in the region. Does it have unique characteristics that make it particularly valuable? Does it have the potential to fill in major gaps in the existing record? This information will be especially important for this project, since DelDOT may not be pursuing mitigation by data recovery at all NRHP-eligible sites.

B. EVALUATION OF THE DALE SITE

1. *Applying the Criteria*

If the properties possess integrity, they may be eligible for listing in the NRHP under four criteria:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

Archaeological sites are most often found eligible for listing under Criterion D, because of their information content; however, the other criteria can apply to archaeological sites. In the current case Criterion B is not relevant for any of the sites, which were occupied by ordinary Delaware residents. Criterion C also does not apply, since the remains at the sites are limited to below-ground foundations and pits of no particular distinction. Criterion A must be applied with caution because in a sense every relic of the past is “associated with” events that make up the “broad patterns of our history.” A farm like the Armstrong-Rogers Site, occupied from perhaps as early as 1739 to 1860, witnessed the clearing of the land, the establishment of a stable agrarian society, the increasing commercialization of American agriculture, the arrival of the railroads (one runs

right past the site), the gradual abandonment of slavery in Delaware, and so on. In general, therefore, properties found significant under Criterion A must have very high integrity, so that their connections to past events are clearly visible in their surviving fabric, or have a very close association to a key event. For example, a house that was used as a field hospital during a Civil War battle may be found significant because of its association with the war, but not a farm that provided food for soldiers on distant campaigns. In central Delaware a group of standing nineteenth-century houses has been found significant partly because their construction corresponded to the transformation of the rough, frontier landscape of colonial times into the settled, ordered world of the Victorian period (Herman 1992), but only a very unusual archaeological site would have sufficient integrity of “location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association” to represent such a broad movement in a period from which many buildings still stand.

2. *Eligibility Recommendation for the Dale Site*

The Dale Site is considered eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion D because it contains important information about the lives of free African-Americans in Delaware between 1800 and 1910.

At least two separate houses (Locus 1 and Locus 3) and probably a third (Locus 2) stood for decades within the site. Some of the occupants of the site are known: Lewis Jones and James Golden at Locus 3 from 1832 to 1837, and the Dale family at Loci 1 and 2 from 1854 to the early 1900s. The known occupants of the site are all African-American. The site therefore provides a good opportunity to study free African-American households in nineteenth-century Delaware.

Criteria A, B, and C do not apply to the site. The surviving remnants of the African-American community along U.S. Route 301 have been evaluated for their possible NRHP eligibility under Criterion A, but the remaining structures were found to lack sufficient integrity (Frederick et al. 2006:54-55). The same considerations apply to the Dale Site. In and of itself, the site does not represent very well the African-American community in the Middletown area, but only a single family, and the remains of the community as a whole have been determined to lack integrity.

3. *Recommended Mitigation Strategy*

The Dale Site is subject to adverse effect because of the imminent construction of U.S. Route 301. Although the Dale Site was considered eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion D, full-scale excavation of the site has not been recommended. After careful consideration, DelDOT and DESHPO have decided to pursue an alternative mitigation strategy for the site. The mitigation will consist of developing a Historic Context for African-American archaeology in St. Georges Hundred.

The main interest of the Dale Site was the opportunity it provided to study the local African-American community in the nineteenth century. However, the archaeological record at the site, while important, was not ideal for this purpose. No building foundations were identified either during the magnetometer survey or the Phase II testing. The magnetometry showed conclusively that no cellar hole or other large pit full of artifacts was present. Smaller pits, postholes, and

other small features were probably present, but these features sometimes yield little in the way of artifacts or faunal remains. Large-scale Phase III excavation of the site might have provided important additional data, but there was a good chance that it might not.

Against the chance that excavation of the site might end up adding little to what was already known about the site was the opportunity to investigate the local African-American community in other ways. The Historic Context will include a detailed study of the African-American community in St. Georges Hundred from 1770 to 1940, based on documentary sources and the archaeology already done in the region. The development of historic contexts is a major goal set out by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Archeology. Archeological sites should be evaluated and studied in the light of what is already known, and historic context documents provide a way to codify existing knowledge and make recommendations about the goals of future research. Delaware's documentary record is rich for the 1770 to 1940 period, and it has not been systematically investigated as a source for African-American history. Nor has a summary been produced of the African-American archaeology done in Delaware to date. For all of these reasons, the development of the Historic Context was held to be a better way to pursue the goal of investigating African-American life in St. Georges Hundred.