

## Chapter 2

### HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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The project area lies in the John Taylor tract, a 17th-century, 250-acre lot situated on the head of Second Drawyer's Creek in St. Georges Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware. John Taylor (Sr.) was a prominent and early landholder, originally from Virginia, who at his death in *circa* 1685 willed the land to his son, John Taylor, Jr. (Archaeological and Historical Consultants, Inc. 2009, 2010). The project area is located in the northeastern corner of the tract near the property boundary with the Snowden tract, later known as the Steele tract (Figure 2.1). A branch of the Reedy Island Cart Road network, connecting the head of the Bohemia River with the Delaware River, was predicted to cross this section of the tract (Figure 2.2). Between 1723 and 1739, the Taylor tract passed through two owners, finally being purchased by Alexander Armstrong. It remained in the Armstrong family until 1824. Between 1824 and 1907, the farm passed through a number of owners, being progressively subdivided and sold for commercial and residential development throughout the 20th century.

Phase II historical research was directed toward support of the archaeological investigation of the Reedy Island Cart Road Locus 4 Site. The focus was on the identification and, where possible, acquisition of, additional primary-source materials that might provide useful data on the occupation and land-use history during the early colonial period, with a particular emphasis on associations with the cart road. The following archives and collections were investigated:

#### A. MARYLAND STATE ARCHIVES

The Maryland State Archives in Annapolis, Maryland were visited in April of 2011 in order to consult early land records and historic maps of the project area. During the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, jurisdiction in the project area was unclear. As a result, some records for the project area were filed in Maryland instead of Delaware. No new information was provided through Land Warrants and Patents research.

An early reference to John Taylor (Sr.) was located in the *Proceedings of the Council of Maryland* (Vol. 3: 341). This reference reports that Taylor had given testimony in May 1661 that he had witnessed the shooting of a Native American by John Forster, who was subsequently killed by the Native Americans. This event had reportedly set off a conflict that was eventually settled at a peace council held at Appoquinimink in September 1661.

#### B. MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA AND LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

As part of developing the historic context for this and other sites located along the cart road, research was undertaken into the history of trade and smuggling and the cart road network. This research into the shipping and customs house records (Maryland Historical Society and Historical Society of Pennsylvania) and the Rumsey Family Papers (Library of Congress) identified smuggling and contraband as an important theme related to the general area lying between the upper eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay and the

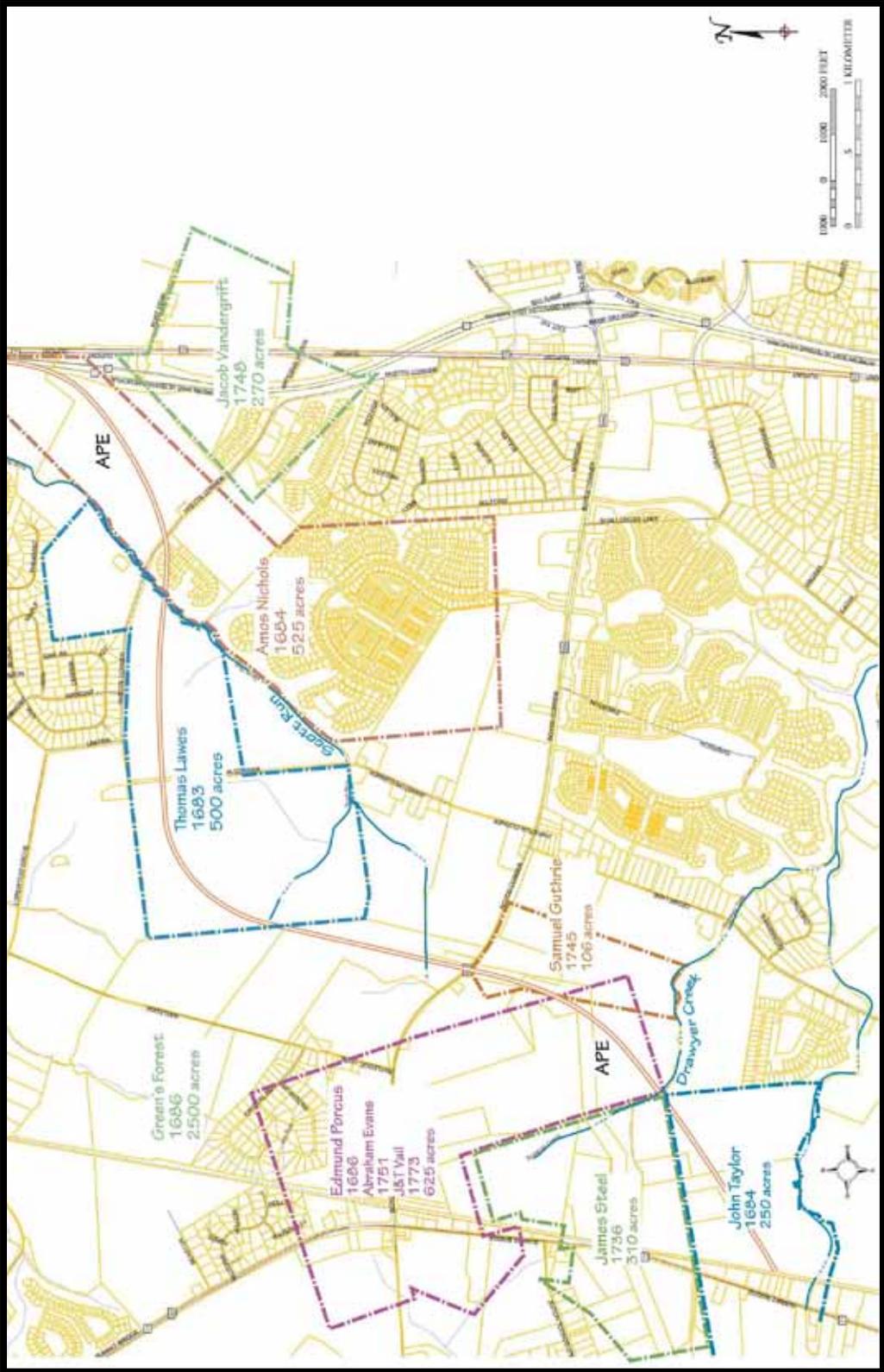


Figure 2.1. The Project Area in Relation to Early Warrants and Patents as Mapped by Archaeological and Historical Consultants Inc. 2010, Figure 3.

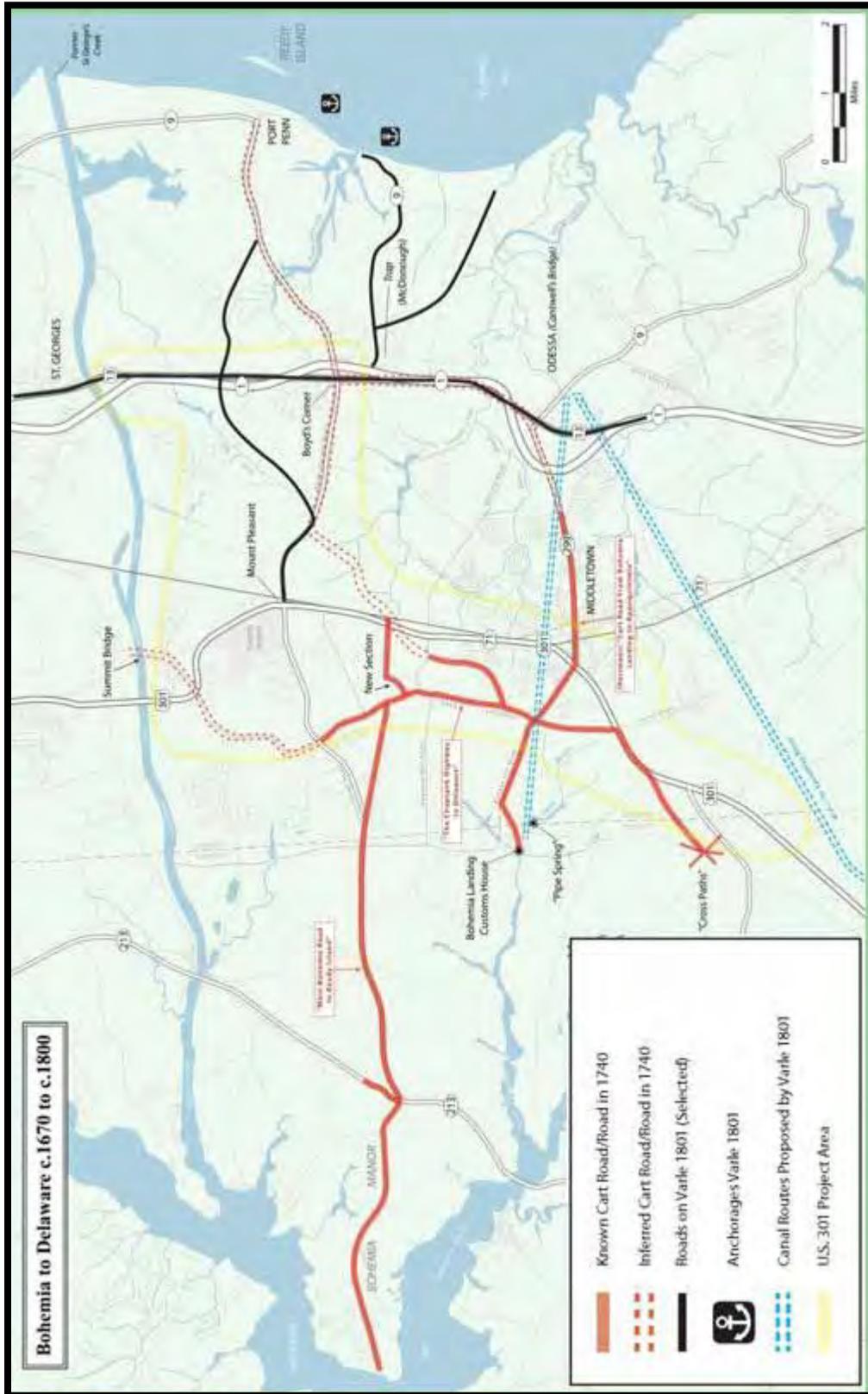


Figure 2.2. The Early Cart Road System from the Upper Chesapeake to the Delaware in the U.S. Route 301 Vicinity, as compiled in 2012. The map is compiled from several sources, but particularly the 1740 Rumsey and 1801 Varle Maps, with inferred or predicted continuations based on topography and other research. The project area is indicated. (Hunter Research, Inc.).

Delaware River. As one might expect when searching for written documentation related to an illicit trade, no references were found that specifically located a smuggling operation or warehousing site along the Reedy Island Cart Road. In general terms, this smuggling appears to have involved ships either lying at anchorage off Reedy Island or calling on the Appoquinimink Creek to avoid the customs agents in Philadelphia. At these locations, ships' captains could offload goods for transport across St. Georges Hundred to the Chesapeake. Chesapeake planters could ship tobacco or other marketable goods back across the watershed avoiding the import duties of the more tightly regulated Maryland and Virginia ports. Delaware, with its historical ties to the Dutch both in the Old and New Worlds, offered potentially lucrative contacts for shipping tobacco outside of the networks regulated by the Navigation Acts. The disputed boundary between Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware and the difficulties that the colonies' officials faced in identifying their jurisdictions only served to abet illicit activity.

### C. DELAWARE PUBLIC ARCHIVES

The Delaware Public Archives in Dover, Delaware were visited in May of 2011 in order to consult New Castle County Deeds, New Castle County Orphan's Court Records and New Castle County Road Returns. Deed records were consulted to confirm previous research. No new land titles or property owners were identified from this research. Review of Orphan's Court records also returned no new information. The Road Papers found one Road Return dated 1797 referring to the property of Cornelius Armstrong. This was for a road from the forks of Drawyers Creek to Appoquinimink Landing that was to cross the "upper State road leading from Middletown to Mount Pleasant near Cornelius Armstrong." The exact proposed location cannot be determined from this description, but the modern Marl Pit road, about

0.75 miles south of the project area, probably follows the generally intended route. According to subsequent filings, the road was not built due to expense.

### D. NEW JERSEY STATE LIBRARY

On file at the New Jersey State Library in Trenton, New Jersey are several texts related to primary documents from New Castle County, Delaware. Carol Garrett published a series of compilations of deed abstracts for New Castle County that supplemented the original deed files consulted at the Delaware Public Archives. The volumes that proved most informative for this project were *New Castle County, Delaware Land Records 1738-1743* and *New Castle County, Delaware Land Records 1749-1752*. No significant additional information was identified from the land record abstracts contained in the two volumes.

Also on file at the New Jersey State Library are transcriptions of *Records of the Court of New Castle, Volume I, 1677-1681* and *Volume II, 1681-1689*. This source proved to contain significant information on John Taylor confirming his status as an important local landholder and official. Among the interesting items gleaned from this source are the following:

- 1677 John Taylor "of Virginia" petitioned to take up 600 acres of land, promising to settle the same with a "considerable family." The court granted 500 acres (Vol. I: 87).
- 1677 John Taylor made a complaint against William Butler for payment of a debt. Taylor was not able to produce proof of the debt and the suit was dismissed (Vol. I: 140).
- 1677 Thomas Snowden petitioned the court to take up 200 acres of land. Snowden was later identified as owning the property immediately north of Taylor's land in the vicinity of the project area (Vol. I: 140-41).

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS: REEDY ISLAND CART ROAD PHASE II, U.S. ROUTE 301, DELAWARE**

- 1677 John Taylor was appointed constable. His jurisdiction was from the south side of St. Georges Creek to the Duke (Duck) Creek (Vol. I: 174).
- 1677 The court instructed property owners to build wolf pits/trap houses because of the continued damage to livestock. John Taylor and Thomas Snowden are instructed to build one joint pit. Presumably this pit was located along their property boundary in the vicinity of the project area (Vol. I: 176-78).
- c.1678 John Foster replaced John Taylor as constable. The swearing in was held in “ye room of John Taylor” (Vol. I: 299). Taylor’s house was known as Lackford Hall and located near the forks of Drawyer’s Creek (not within the current project area and on a different tract of land) (Scharf 1888: 986).
- c.1678 John Taylor petitioned the court to acknowledge his deed of purchase of 250 acres of land from Walter Wharton, deceased. He requested that the tract be resurveyed and that he be held harmless against intruding upon other mens’ land.
- c.1678 John Taylor appointed a tax appraiser for New Castle.
- 1680 Jacob and Anna Joung sued John Taylor for defamation. Taylor confirmed in court that he had accused Jacob of hiring Indians to kill Christians. Taylor acknowledged before the court that his accusation was based on hearsay and that Joung, as far as he knew, was an honest man (Vol. I: 438).
- 1681 John Taylor, Thomas Snowden and Phillip Chevalier were each fined 300 pounds of tobacco. The reason is not given (Vol. I: 502).
- 1681/82 John Taylor acknowledged the sale and satisfaction of 170 acres of his 620 acre tract to Thomas Snowden (Vol. II: 19-20).
- 1682 John Taylor and Thomas Snowden each paid tax on two tithables. Taylor also paid tax on 200 acres of land (presumably the cleared/productive portion of his larger property). Considering this was likely land near Lackford Hall, it suggests that the project area may not yet have been cleared (Vol. II: 85).
- 1684 John Taylor (Jr.) petitioned court to appoint guardians for his father’s estate (Vol. II: 104).
- 1685 Jane Taylor (John Sr.’s widow) acknowledged a deed of 100 acres of land at the head of the second Drawyer’s creek, given to her by her husband (Vol. II: 108).

**D. PENNSYLVANIA GAZETTE**

A search for relevant people and place names in the *Pennsylvania Gazette’s* online database (available through Accessible Archives) returned no data directly relevant data to the property. However, a reference to the adjacent Steele tract located immediately north of the Taylor tract was identified. On May 5, 1742, the Estate of James Steele listed for sale numerous tracts of land in Pennsylvania and Delaware. The 310-acre Steele tract was described as has “having a rich White Oak swamp” but does not mention the existence of any buildings.

This research focused on the last quarter of the 17th century and the first quarter of the 18th century based on research questions associated with the Reedy Island Cart Road. It strongly suggests that the property was not occupied by its owners during the Taylor period (*circa* 1678-1723), therefore any archaeological evidence of occupation during that period would

likely be related to a previously unknown tenant farm or natural resources procurement or trade-related activities located along the cart road. In 1677, a wolf pit was ordered built, presumably somewhere along the boundary line between Taylor's and Snowden's properties. Considering that wolf pits were unlikely to be built near houses or livestock, it seems likely that the project area was not settled at this early date. As late as 1742, the Steel tract located immediately north of the project area was advertised as being valuable for its white oak swamp, suggesting that much of the poorly draining land near the headwaters of the northern branch of Drawyer's Creek were not being cultivated.

The multiple-generation Armstrong family period of ownership (*circa* 1739-1823) appears to correspond well with the main period of occupation of the site as reflected in the artifact assemblage. Any further research should focus on the Armstrong family. Genealogical records from the Delaware Public Archives and on-line resources may provide additional data related to the Armstrong household structure and its socio-economic status. This context would be useful in analyzing the archaeological data and placing it in historic context(s).