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PHASE I ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY INVESTIGATIONS
WIGGINS MILL ROAD BRIDGE REPLACEMENT [BRIDGE #424]
APPOQUINIMINK HUNDRED, NEW CASTLE COUNTY, DELAWARE
96-071-04 EBROS-N446(1)

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

A. Introduction

From April 18th to April 26, 1996 Hunter Research Inc. conducted a Phase I archaeological survey in connection with the proposed improvement of Wiggins Mill Road and the replacement of Delaware State Bridge #424 in Townsend, Appoquinimink Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware. The project area consists of a corridor extending for 1,860 linear feet along and immediately adjacent to Road 446, a minor road that is also known locally as Wiggins Mill Road (Figure 1). An unnamed tributary of the Appoquinimink River is spanned by Bridge #424 roughly mid-way along the project corridor.

B. Background Research

The background research undertaken as part of this survey identified four historic resources: 1). the site of Wiggin's Gristmill; 2). Wiggin's Millpond Bridge (Delaware State Bridge #424); 3). the site of the William M. Johnson House, a frame dwelling house on the mill property; and 4). the site of the Davis/Townsend House, a brick colonial dwelling. The history of each of these resources is briefly outlined below.

1. Wiggin's Grist Mill

The earliest documented reference to a mill building at the crossing of Wiggins Mill Road over this unnamed tributary of Appoquinimink River apparently occurs in a tax assessment of 1797 for Appoquinimink Hundred. In this assessment, William Williams is listed as owning 444 acres with a brick dwelling house (see below, the Davis/Townsend House), a log house, a kitchen, a mill and five outbuildings. The mill is also further mentioned in a conveyance of the property to the Reverend Joseph Whitby in 1813 (New Castle County Deed G-4 431). In that year Williams sold 504 acres, containing the mill and other buildings, to the Rev. Whitby for the sum of $7,805. Prior to the sale, this land had been divided into two farms, a 183-acre tract known as the "Mansion Farm" and a 321-acre tract known as the "Forest Farm." The deed of conveyance mentions that both a sawmill and gristmill were located on the "Mansion Farm" tract. The tax assessment list of 1816 shows Whitby owning 500 acres, a brick dwelling

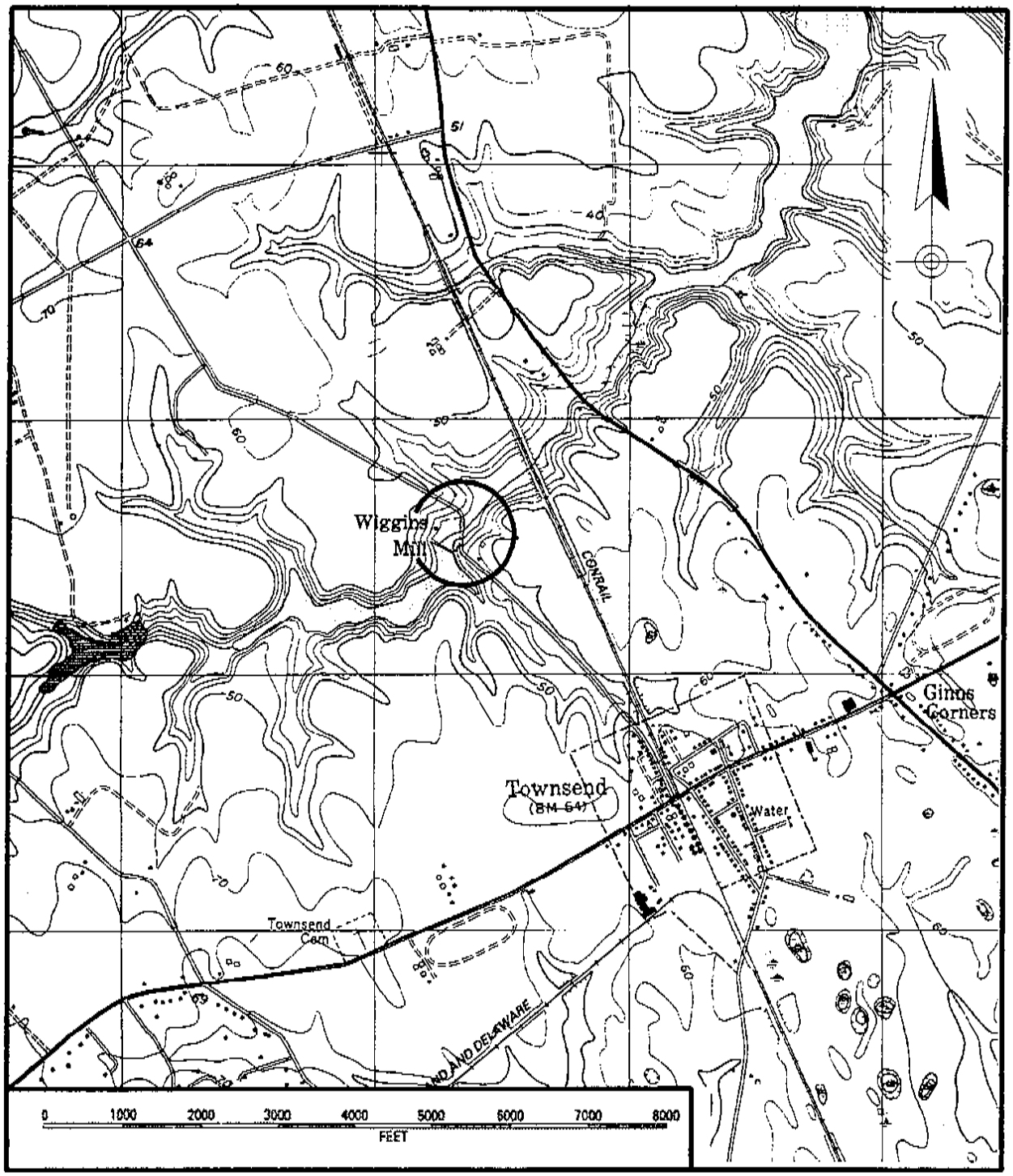

Figure 1. Location of Project Area (Circled). Source: USGS 7.5' Topographic Series, Middletown, DE. Quadrangle (1953 [Photorevised 1986]).

(possibly the Davis/Townsend house) and a single gristmill, suggesting that the sawmill was no longer in operation. All were valued at a total of $2,000. The tax assessment also lists him as owning three slaves, valued at $150. In the tax assessment of 1822 Whitby is listed as owning two properties, a 125-acre farm with a brick house and gristmill, valued at $700 and a 387 acre farm with a log house, valued at $580. In that same year Joseph Whitby died leaving his property to his son John Whitby (Appoquinimink Hundred Tax Ratable Assessments 1797, 1816, 1822).

John Whitby owned and operated the gristmill for the next 13 years. The tax assessment of 1828-34 lists him as owning 899 acres containing two brick houses and one barn valued at $6,238 (Appoquinimink Hundred Tax Ratable Assessments 1828-34). In 1835, Whitby sold 13 acres of his property, including the gristmill, to Garrett Othoson (New Castle County Deed W-4 420). In 1848, Othoson sold the mill property to Abel J. Porter (New Castle County Deed Z-5 230). It is in this deed that the first mention of the mill pond is made. Porter apparently increased the size of this pond in 1849 when, for $60, he purchased the right to flood three acres belonging to his neighbor, Alexander Crawford (New Castle County Deed C-6 115).

In 1850 Porter sold the mill property to Benjamin MacDaniel of Wilmington (New Castle County Deed F-6 416). The deed records the property as being 16.5 acres and indicates that the gristmill had been destroyed by a fire and was formerly known as the Williams or Whitby Mill. Sometime within the next four years MacDaniel is believed to have rebuilt the gristmill. The tax assessment of 1854 has MacDaniel listed as owning a four-acre tract of land containing a frame house and a gristmill, valued at $2,500. After the death of MacDaniel, which occurred in 1854, the property was seized for debts he owed and was sold to Joseph A. Hunter, a carriage maker from Wilmington (New Castle County Deed U-6 259).

Hunter owned the mill until 1859 and then sold it to Thomas Wright (New Castle County Deed G-7 302). At this date the mill property included five acres, a frame house, a gristmill and a frame stable. The tax assessment of 1857-61 lists Wright as owning a four-acre property with a frame house and gristmill valued at $2,500 (Appoquinimink Hundred Tax Ratable Assessments 1857-61). The population census of 1850 lists him as a 38-year-old constable. In the census of 1860 he is listed as a "Grist Miller" (Federal Census of Delaware, Population Schedules 1850, 1860). The census also records a John Lewis, aged 23 and a miller by occupation, as living with him. In 1864 Wright sold the mill property to John R. Lewis (New Castle County Deed V-7 426). In the following year, the heirs of Benjamin MacDaniel executed a quit claim to the entire 16.5-acre mill tract to Lewis (New Castle County Deed V-7 421).

In 1864 Lewis sold the 16.5-acre mill property to William M. Johnson (New Castle County Deed U-7 429). Johnson appears in the Beers Atlas of Delaware in 1868 (Figure 2) as the owner of a frame house and gristmill. He is also listed in the industrial census of 1870 as owning a gristmill valued at $4,000. The mill is described as having one water wheel and two burrs capable of processing ten bushels a day. The production for the immediately preceding year was 4,000 bushels of flour, 3,500 bushels of meal and 1,200 bushels of alfalfa (Federal Census of Delaware, Industrial Schedules 1870).

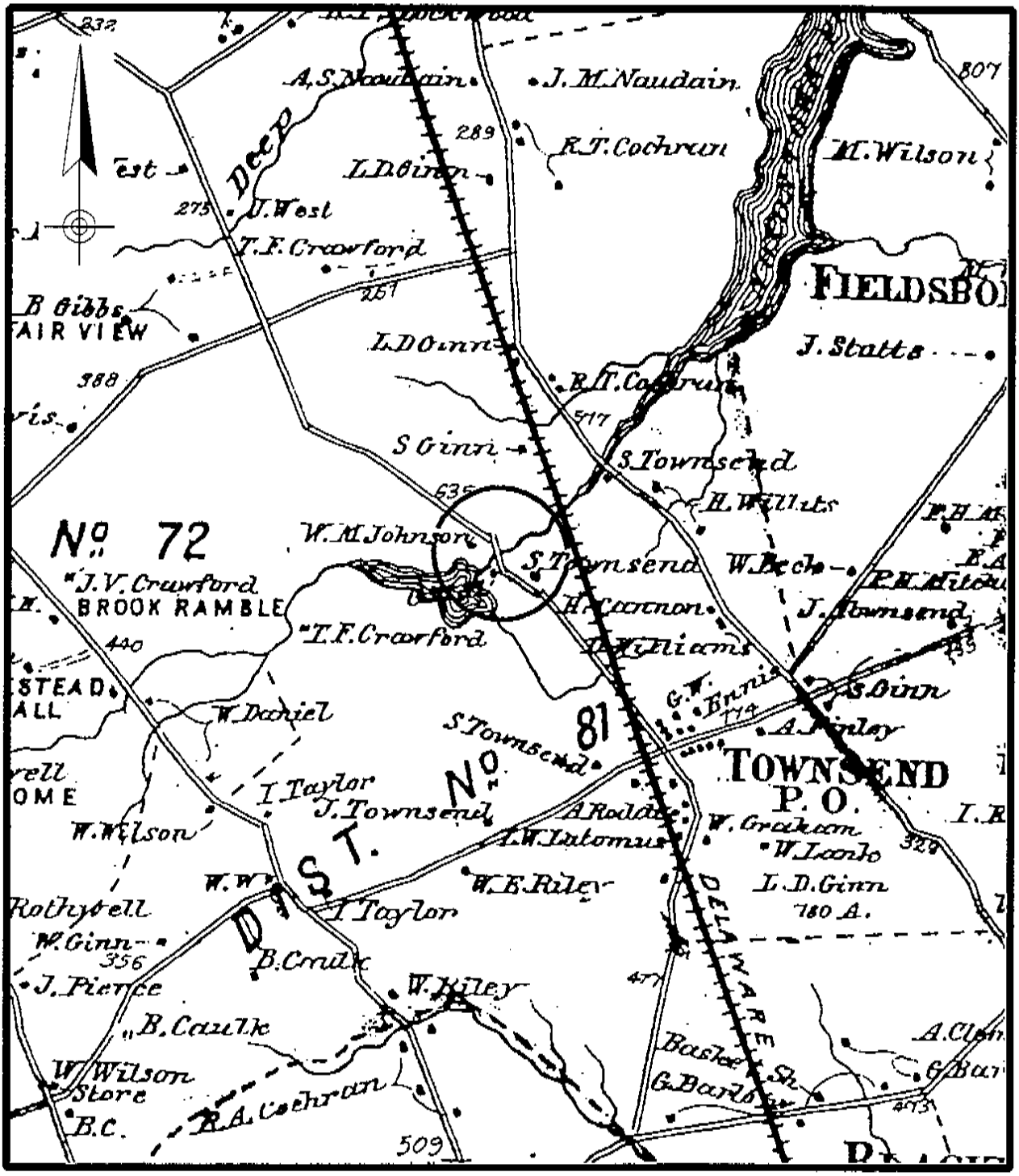

Figure 2. Beers, D.G. Atlas of the State of Delaware. Appoquinimink Hundred. 1868. Scale 1 inch: ½ mile. Project Area Circled.

In 1871, Johnson sold the mill property to Israel Allston Harmon (New Castle County Deed L-9 317). The industrial census of 1880 describes the mill as having an average daily production of 85 bushels. It produced 606 barrels of flour, 338,040 lbs. of corn meal and 54,940 lbs. of feed. The water wheel is described as being 11 feet in breadth, of overshot type, and capable of generating 15 horse power (Federal Census of Delaware, Industrial Schedules 1880).

Scharf's History of Delaware, published in 1888, gives the following reference to Wiggin's Gristmill which roughly confirms and slightly expands on the history established from the chain of title: "The earliest record of the mill now owned by I.A. Harmon is found on the assessment list of 1816, when it was the property of Joseph Whitby, who was a large land owner in the vicinity of the mill. At his death the mill passed to his son, John, who operated it for some time, and then sold it to Garret Ottison. It was afterwards owned by --- Hunter, who sold it to ---McDaniel, by whom it was repaired and generally improved. The mill was next owned respectively by John Lewis and William Johnson, by whom it was conveyed to the present owner. It was a two-story frame building, situated a mile north of Townsend. It was fitted up with burrs, and grinds custom work exclusively" (Scharf 1888:1023).

In 1915, Israel Harmon sold the mill property to George Wiggin (New Castle County Deed L-25 188). The deed of conveyance refers to the mill dam as Harmon's Dam. Wiggin owned the property for the next 14 years. In 1928, he sold it to Robert Moore (New Castle County Deed V-35 559).

Proposed road improvement plans (not illustrated) for Road 446/Wiggins Mill Road dating to 1938 show the mill building with an attached porch owned by F.W. Pickard. A small shed is depicted to the east of the mill building. It is not known when the mill stopped operating and was eventually torn down, although it is reported that about ten years ago the Hagley Museum acquired the "wheel" of the mill and moved it to the museum's property (George Schreppler 1996: personal communication).

2. Wiggin's Millpond Bridge (Delaware State Bridge 424)

This bridge was examined by the Delaware Historic Bridges Survey conducted by P.A.C. Spero & Company in 1991. The survey describes the bridge as being a single span riveted Warren Pony Truss type, 34 feet in length and 14.5 feet in width. The southwest wing wall is inscribed "Rebuilt 1884" by "J.T. Taylor, L.C. Com." The superstructure was constructed by the Edge Moor Bridge Works of Wilmington, Delaware (P.A.C. Spero & Company 1991:54). The report gives no indication about the type of bridge that this one replaced. The bridge has been recorded by the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office as Cultural Resource Site N-4303.

3. William M. Johnson House Site

The Beers Atlas of Delaware published in 1868 (Figure 2) shows a house belonging to W.M. Johnson on the northwest side of present Road 446. This building which consisted of a frame house was associated with Wiggin's Gristmill starting around the second half of the 19th century. The earliest reference to a frame house on the mill property is in the tax assessment of Appoquinimink Hundred in 1854. Benjamin MacDaniel, the owner of the mill from 1850-1854 is listed in this tax record as owning a frame house and a gristmill valued at $2,500 (Appoquinimink Hundred Tax Ratable Assessments 1854). The Rea and Price map of New Castle County in 1849 (not illustrated) does not show any house in this area indicating that the building was constructed sometime between 1849 and 1854. William M. Johnson was the owner of the gristmill from 1864 until 1871. MacDaniel most likely is responsible for the house's construction. The first mention of this house in the deed records is in the 1928 transfer between the widow Wiggin and Robert Moore (New Castle County Deed V-35 559). This deed mentions a frame house as well as the gristmill and milldam. Today, a house owned by the Schreppler family is located on the site of the former William M. Johnson House.

4. Davis/Townsend House Site

The exact date for the construction of the Davis/Townsend House remains unclear. The tax assessment of 1797 for the property of William Williams alludes to the presence of a brick house on the Wiggin's Mill property (Appoquinimink Hundred Tax Ratable Assessments 1797). Similarly, a brick house on the "Mansion Farm" is one of the properties conveyed by William Williams to Joseph Whitby in 1813 (New Castle County Deed G-4 431).

In 1837 John Whitby sold 217 acres containing a plantation to Thomas Davis (New Castle County Deed B-5 203) for $3,250. Eighteen years later, in 1855, Davis sold the same property to Samuel Townsend (New Castle County Deed S-6 184) for the sum of $10,000. The Beers Atlas of 1868 (Figure 2) labels the house at this location with "S. Townsend." After the death of Samuel Townsend, which occurred in 1881, his son, Samuel Townsend inherited the property (New Castle County Will Book F-2 320). Proposed road improvement plans dating to 1938 (not illustrated) show that the Davis/Townsend House consisted of a two-story L-shaped brick building. The property included a barn and an open rectangular shed. The house and property remained in the Townsend family until 1964 when it was sold to Ruth Vogel of Wilmington (New Castle County Deed Z-73 557).

In 1977, the house was recorded by the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office as Cultural Resource Site N-102. It is described as "a Colonial brick house in disrepair but amazingly authentic." According to the site form, the building had never been fitted with electrical service or plumbing. A photograph accompanying the site form shows the house as it existed during the recording of the site. Sometime within the last ten years the house was torn down.