

## **PHYSIOGRAPHIC SETTING**

The project area lies in the northwestern portion of New Castle County (Figure 1), about two miles south of the Fall Line, the boundary between the Piedmont Uplands and the Coastal Plain Physiographic provinces. In Delaware, the Fall Line approximates the east/west corridor of Route 2 (Kirkwood Highway) between Newark and Wilmington. The Piedmont topography is characterized by rolling hills with elevations ranging between 100 and 400 feet above sea level. The Atlantic Coastal Plain to the southeast of the Fall Line consists of a gently undulating plain frequently interrupted by broad floodplain valleys, meandering streams, and large areas of salt marsh. Elevations range between sea level and 125 feet. The Wilson/Slack project area is level, although a small rise at an elevation of 80 feet crests approximately 100 feet to the west of the property. The main house is located on the eastern edge of this rise. Downslope and to the northeast is a drainage area linked to the Christiana River. At one time a man-made pond existed within this now filled-in area. Local vegetation consists of cultivated and fallow agricultural fields and wooded areas.

## **PREVIOUS CULTURAL RESOURCE INVESTIGATIONS**

The initial historic research on the Wilson/Slack site was an economic historical research project performed by Stephen Del Sordo under the direction of Bernard Herman of the Department of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware. This work is included in its entirety as Appendix II. The study analyzed a collection of business records and account books kept by Alexander Wilson during the period 1853-78. The basic thrust of the study was: 1) to compare Wilson's income and real estate evaluation with other local manufacturers, through use of the Census of Manufacturers Returns for 1850-1880, 2) to study the family's genealogy using U.S. population censuses, 3) to analyze A. Wilson's ledger books

in order to compare his official and unofficial income reporting characteristics, and 4) to track the growth of his business through time. Also briefly discussed was the extant physical remains of Alexander Wilson's shop and main house. It was mainly through this initial study that the significance of the Alexander Wilson/Slack site was recognized.

Following this research and in conjunction with cultural resource management responsibilities for the Delaware Route 4 reconstruction, DelDOT conducted a Phase I and partial Phase II archaeological survey. The Phase I investigation consisted of oral interviews of site occupants, a surface reconnaissance of the project area, and the archaeological excavation of 16 2 ft. by 2 ft. test pits, one five ft. by five ft. test pit, and 21 strata cuts placed along the western and southern boundaries of the site. The location of the test pits and squares was intended to determine the integrity of the below-ground remains of the former grist mill. Test pits numbers 3 through 17 and test square 5 were placed adjacent to structures or features known through the surface reconnaissance (Figure 3). These excavations confirmed the presence of an intact foundation of the former grist mill and the existence of considerable fill levels over a nineteenth-to twentieth-century buried topsoil north of the support structures. The two units placed in the domestic yard area terminated before reaching sterile soil due to the objection of the property owner to further excavation. Units placed along the northern boundary of the domestic area indicated that this area had been disturbed through plowing activities. The strata cuts on the west railroad bank uncovered a mortar slab pavement 20 to 24 inches below the ground surface buried by a coal/cinder layer assumed to be associated with nineteenth-century railroad activity. The eastern bank strata cuts showed an 11 inch to 24 inch thick topsoil horizon developed over an undisturbed natural subsoil. A Phase II testing program for the site was recommended.

Preliminary Phase II test excavations by DelDOT were designed to further determine the horizontal extent of the grist mill foundations located in the Phase I survey, and to determine the Wilson/Slack site's eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Four five ft. by five ft. test units were excavated to further define the former grist mill's context (Figure 3). The results showed that while the entire foundation was intact, there was a conspicuous absence of artifacts both inside and outside of the foundation walls. Efforts to complete testing in the yard areas were again frustrated by the property owner. Archival research accumulated substantial information on the business activities of families associated with the site. The results of this research are integrated into the culture history of the present report. DelDOT recommended and the SHPO concurred that additional Phase II test excavations should be completed before road construction.

Prior to the present, and final, Phase II test excavations, two Historic American Buildings Survey recordations were performed by the College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware. In 1982 the frame blacksmith/implements works shop was recorded, and in 1983 the remaining extant buildings on the site were recorded (Herman and Ames 1983). This publication is reproduced in its entirety as Appendix II and it represents the Phase II data recovery for the standing structure complex.

Finally, during the Summer and Fall of 1983, the final Phase II testing of the site was completed by the University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research. This report presents the total findings of the Phase II research.