

CHAPTER 10

DAWSON HOUSE SITE [7K-C-414]

A. Historical Detail

During the late 17th century, the Dawson House Site was contained within a 600-acre tract of land, historically known as "Smyrna." By 1731 this tract had been subdivided into smaller parcels and the Dawson House Site lay within an undeveloped 40-acre parcel of land owned by Andrew Caldwell (see Kent County Deed K-1 202; Table 10.1). Caldwell's property was bounded on the north by Walker's Branch (renamed Puncheon Run in the 19th century) and extended northeast-southwest on either side of present-day U.S. Route 113A for a distance of approximately 2,200 feet. The parcel's southern boundary was defined by a large tract of land known as "Shoemaker's Hall."

In 1731, Caldwell sold the 40-acre property to John Reynalls (Kent County Deed K-1 202). Reynall's ownership of the property was short lived. Three years later, he conveyed the land to Philip Lewis for 20 pounds (Kent County Deed K-1 202). The deed of conveyance records that, at the time of the sale, Lewis was a resident of New Castle County, possibly implying that the property was still undeveloped at this time or was inhabited by a tenant.

In 1740, Lewis sold two tracts of land to Thomas Dawson (Kent County Deed M-1 87). One tract was described as containing 50 acres and "now [being] in the possession of Thomas Dawson." This property was bounded on the north by Walker's Branch and contained within its limits the original 40-acre tract that Lewis had acquired from Reynalls. Although Dawson did not obtain title to this tract until 1740, it appears as though he may have made some form of agreement with Lewis prior to this date allowing him to make use of, and perhaps occupy, the property. The second tract contained 100 acres and was located to the south of the project corridor near Isaac's Branch.

Thomas Dawson set about obtaining a warrant on his recently acquired property, which resulted in a survey map being prepared for the more northerly of the two parcels in November, 1745 (Figures 10.1 and 10.2; Table 10.2). This latter tract, now defined as containing 72 acres, was situated on the south side of Walker's Branch and contained Dawson's residence as well as a malt house (shown as an open-sided-roofed structure), a barn and a small unidentified building. This map provides the first definitive evidence of the improvement of this property and gives a useful indication of the types of activities that were taking place on the property (Delaware Warrants and Surveys D6 73).

**TABLE 10.1. THOMAS DAWSON HOUSE SITE
SEQUENCE OF OWNERSHIP**

Ownership Tenure	Name	Acquisition Citation
-1731	Andrew Caldwell	See Kent Co. Deed K-1 202
1731-1734	John Reynalls	Kent Co. Deed K-1 202
1734-1740	Philip Lewis	Kent Co. Deed K-1 207
1740-1754	Thomas Dawson	Kent Co. Deed M-1 87
1754-1756	Richard Dawson	See Kent Co. Deed O-1 343
1756-1779	Thomas Nixon	Kent Co. Deed O-1 343
1779-1794	Letitia Coakley (formerly Vandyke, then Rogerson)	Kent Co. Deed W-1 181
1794-1816	Richard Cooper	Kent Co. Deed E-2 139
1816-	Ignatius T. Cooper	Kent Co. Will P-1 131
-1904	Sarah L. Cooper	Kent Co. Deed ?
1904-1908	Sophia C. Perkins	Kent Co. Will D-2 371
1908 (Aug.)	Arthur J. Kinsbury	Kent Co. Deed P-9 493
1908-	Lydia C. Maloney	Kent Co. Deed P-9 495

TABLE 10.2. MID-18TH CENTURY THRU MID-19TH CENTURY PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN THE VICINITY OF COOPER'S CORNER (See Figure 10.2).

Lot 1A:	1740-1754	Thomas Dawson
	1754-1756	Richard Dawson
	1756-1779	Thomas Nixon
	1779-1794	Letitia Rogerson (formerly Vandyke, then Coakley)
	1794-1816	Richard Cooper
	1816-????	Ignatius T. Cooper
Lot 1B:	1740-1754	Thomas Dawson
	1754-1756	Richard Dawson
	1756-c.1780	Thomas Nixon
	c.1780-1787	Nicholas Nixon and Charles Nixon
	1787-1794	Letitia Rogerson (formerly Vandyke, then Coakley)
	1794-1816	Richard Cooper
	1816-1852	Richard J. Cooper
	1852-1855	William P. Cooper
	1855-1860	William R. Morris
	1860-?	Joseph D. Parker
Lot 2:	1743-c.1780	Thomas Nixon
	c.1780-1787	Nicholas Nixon and Charles Nixon
	1787-1794	Letitia Rogerson (formerly Vandyke, then Coakley)
	1794-1816	Richard Cooper
	1816-1852	Richard J. Cooper
	1852-1855	William P. Cooper
	1855-?	William R. Morris
Lot 3:	by 1756-c.1780	Thomas Nixon
	c.1780-1787	Nicholas Nixon and Charles Nixon
	1787-1794	Letitia Rogerson (formerly Vandyke, then Coakley)
	1794-1816	Richard Cooper
Lot 4:	by 1756-1779	Thomas Nixon
	1779-1794	Letitia Rogerson (formerly Vandyke, then Coakley)
	1794-1816	Richard Cooper

The presence of a malthouse is of particular interest and merits further comment. Nearby Walker's Branch would have provided Dawson with an ample supply of fresh water making this a suitable spot at which to set up a brewing operation. Malting, the process of steeping grain in water to the point where it softened and became malt, was considered both a household industry and a specialized trade in colonial times. It was sometimes conducted independently or formed part of the more extended process of brewing. Most malthouses were of simple construction, consisting primarily of a roofed shelter which was either open on all sides or enclosed on the sides and rear. Grains which were malted for fermentation include barley, wheat and Indian corn. The process of manufacturing malt involved putting a large amount of the desired grain into a water filled trough or tub. The mix was allowed to steep approximately three days after which the grains were placed into small piles and allowed to dry. The drying process served to deaden the grain so that it became sweet and mellow, melted easily in brewing and became separated from the husk. Drying was often aided by the use of an oven or kiln. The dried grains were then lightly crushed between stones, just sufficient to obtain the extract needed for brewing. Most of the utensils used in the malting process were made of wood and the operations were manual and labor intensive (Clark 1949:166-167; Long 1972:168-169).

Thomas Dawson occupied the property until his death in 1754. In that year his estate was divided equally amongst his wife, Margaret, and his two children, Richard and Sarah. By 1756, the younger Richard Dawson gained full title to his father's property and in August of that year he sold 50 acres of land to Thomas Nixon (Kent County Deed O-1 343). The description of the property's boundaries lacks precision, but it is believed that the land contained the site of Thomas Dawson's residence and his other buildings (i.e., the malthouse, barn and related structures). By the close of 1756 Nixon had amassed about 500 acres, situated on both sides of Walker's Branch and extending north as far as present-day Wyoming Avenue and south to Isaac's Branch.

In 1779, Thomas Nixon sold almost all of his property situated on the south side of Walker's Branch to his daughter, Letitia Vandyke (Kent County Deed W-1 181). This portion of his holdings amounted to 234 acres and included the Dawson House Site. The majority of the land was located between present-day U.S. Routes 113A (State Street) and 13A. Letitia Vandyke owned the property for the next 15 years, most likely -- based on archaeological evidence (see below) -- residing not in Dawson's original house, but in another residence located elsewhere on the property or in her father's house located on the west side of State Road (present-day State Street), north of Walker's Branch. Sometime during this period Thomas Nixon passed away and by 1794 Letitia Vandyke had gained full title to all of her father's estate from her two brothers, Charles and Nicholas Nixon. Also, at some point between 1782 and 1794, she obtained ownership to her father's house and the 140 acres on which it was sited. In 1787, she purchased from Charles Nixon (executor of her father's estate) 120 acres situated on both sides of Walker's Branch and to the east of State Street (Kent County Deed X-1 173). This last property contained a fulling mill (see below, Chapter 11, Section A).

In 1794, William Montgomery and Letitia Coakley (formerly Vandyke, then Rogerson) sold the entire Nixon estate to Richard Cooper (Kent County Deed E-2 139). The property was officially surveyed at 491+ acres of land and contained the site of the original Dawson homestead and outbuildings, the fulling mill, Nixon's house and all of what eventually became known as Cooper's Corner (Figure 10.2). Richard Cooper is believed to have taken up residence in the house where Thomas Nixon formerly resided. This house is known today as the Cooper House and is located to the north of the project area at 1068 South State Street (Heite and Heite 1986).

Richard Cooper owned the property containing the Dawson House Site until his death in 1816. Cooper's last will and testament, proved in the same year, divided his estate among his children (Kent County Will P-1 131). The land containing the Dawson House Site is believed to have been set off to his son, Ignatius T. Cooper. Cooper's will describes this land as being part of the property he purchased from Montgomery and Coakley. It is further described as being situated on the south side of Walker's Branch and located between the road from Dover to Mallistons (sp?) Mills (U.S. Route 113A) and the road from Dover to Camden (U.S. Route 13A). Richard Jennifer Cooper received the land containing the site of the fulling mill, which by this date appears to have been superseded by a sawmill (see below, Chapter 11, Section A).

The property containing the Dawson House Site remained within the Cooper family until around the turn of the century. Based on archaeological evidence (see below), it is believed that no domestic occupation took place on the site during the 19th century. Certainly by 1868, when the Beers map of the State of Delaware was published (see above, Figure 5.2), the buildings attributed to Thomas Dawson were long gone. The map depicts no structures in the southern angle of the intersection of U.S. Route 13A (Governors Avenue) and U.S. Route 113A (State Street), where the Dawson homestead was formerly located. The closest building, labeled "Mrs. Cooper," is located to the northwest of the site, on the northwest side of U.S. Route 13A. Later conveyances pertaining to the property containing the Dawson House Site indicate that "Mrs. Cooper" was probably Sarah L. Cooper.

Sarah L. Cooper died in 1904 leaving her 72-acre farm to her sister, Sophia C. Perkins (Kent County Will D-2 371). This property was situated on both sides of present-day Governors Avenue and extended east as far as U.S. Route 113A, thereby including the Dawson House Site. In August, 1908, Perkins sold the 72 acres to Arthur J. Kinsbury (Kent County Deed P-9 493), who, in the following month, sold the same property to Lydia C. Maloney (Kent County Deed P-9 495). Maloney is shown as the owner of the property on the construction plans for U.S. Route 113A in 1919 (see above, Figure 5.4).

Thus, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Dawson House Site was located on a 72-acre farm that straddled Governors Avenue. The nucleus of the farmstead was located on the northwest side of Governors Avenue. The area containing the Dawson House Site was probably under cultivation during these years. By the mid-20th century, the 72-acre farm had begun to be subdivided and the land containing the Dawson House site was owned by Samuel Berkman. The construction plans for U.S. Route 13 prepared in 1950 (see above, Figure 5.6b) show that a brick

house had been constructed near the Dawson House Site. This is believed to have been the residence of Berkman, who is shown as owner of the surrounding property. Today, the Dawson House Site is located on a well manicured grassy knoll overlooking Puncheon Run (formerly known as Walker's Branch). Samuel Berkman's house no longer stands, having been intentionally burned (along with an outbuilding) by the local fire department during a practice session at some point within the past 15 years.

B. Archaeological Field Survey

The Dawson House Site, as defined by archaeological field testing and current land use constraints, covers an area measuring approximately 100 meters northeast-southwest by 50 meters northwest-southeast that is contained within a block of land bounded on the west by U.S. Route 13, on the north by Puncheon Run, on the east by South State Street, and on the south by a line running perpendicular to U.S. Route 13 at station 348+00. The site was initially identified through Phase I field investigations when a pair of shovel tests recovered sherds of mid- to late 18th-century imported British ceramics to the northwest of station 349+00 within the area of a proposed water quality detention basin. During the subsequent Phase II survey a total of 43 shovel tests (ST# 74, 75, 92-108 and 115-138) and 12 one-meter-square excavation units were located within and around this area (Figure 10.3). In an effort to clarify the extent of the site, excavation units were placed in areas of both high and low artifact density.

C. Stratigraphic and Feature Analysis

No obvious above-ground features or topographic anomalies were noted in the vicinity of the Dawson House Site, which from the documentary record was known to have been abandoned at least 125 years ago, and from archaeological evidence is thought to have been unoccupied for more than two centuries (see below). Excavation units located in the core of the site revealed several large subsoil features just below a deflated plowzone, some of which may have been related to the malting activity known to have been taking place in the mid-18th century.

Excavation Units 1, 6 and 9 identified a robber trench for a wall footing [context 3], the fill of which [2] showed signs of intense burning (Figure 10.4; Plate 10.1). This feature, somewhat irregular in plan, may relate to the site of a malt kiln or oven foundation, or could be evidence of a small outbuilding destroyed by fire, whose foundation was later removed. The size and shape of the robber trench do not conform well with an interpretation of this feature as the site of a dwelling. A charred surface recorded as context 3 in Excavation Units 3, 5 and 7 may also be related to roasting activities or to a destruction episode involving a fire (Figure 10.5; Plate 10.2). In each of these two blocks of three adjoining excavation units, the deposits below the deflated plowzone were for the most part identified and then left unexcavated, although selected units were sampled to examine the depth and integrity of these contexts.

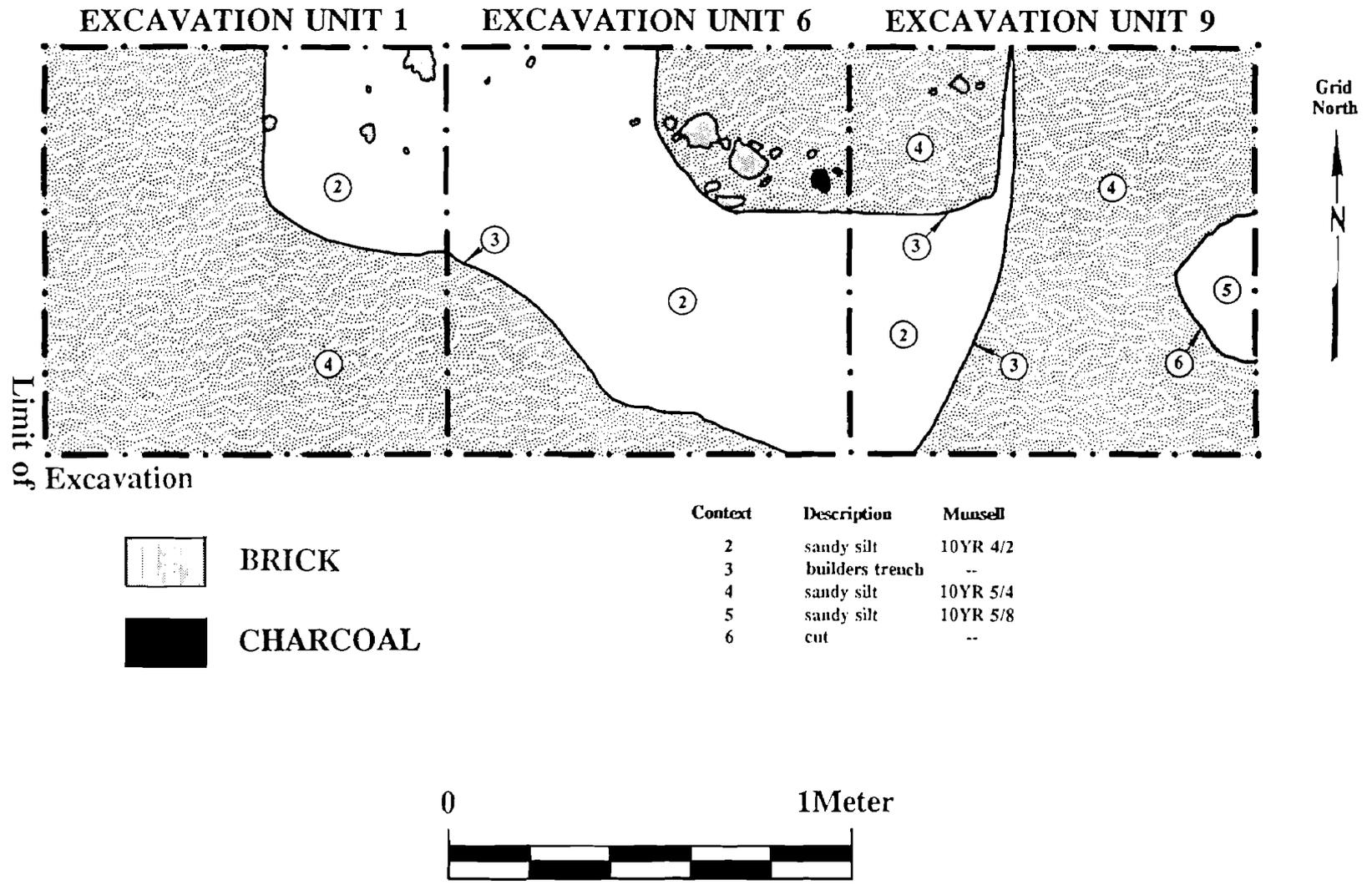
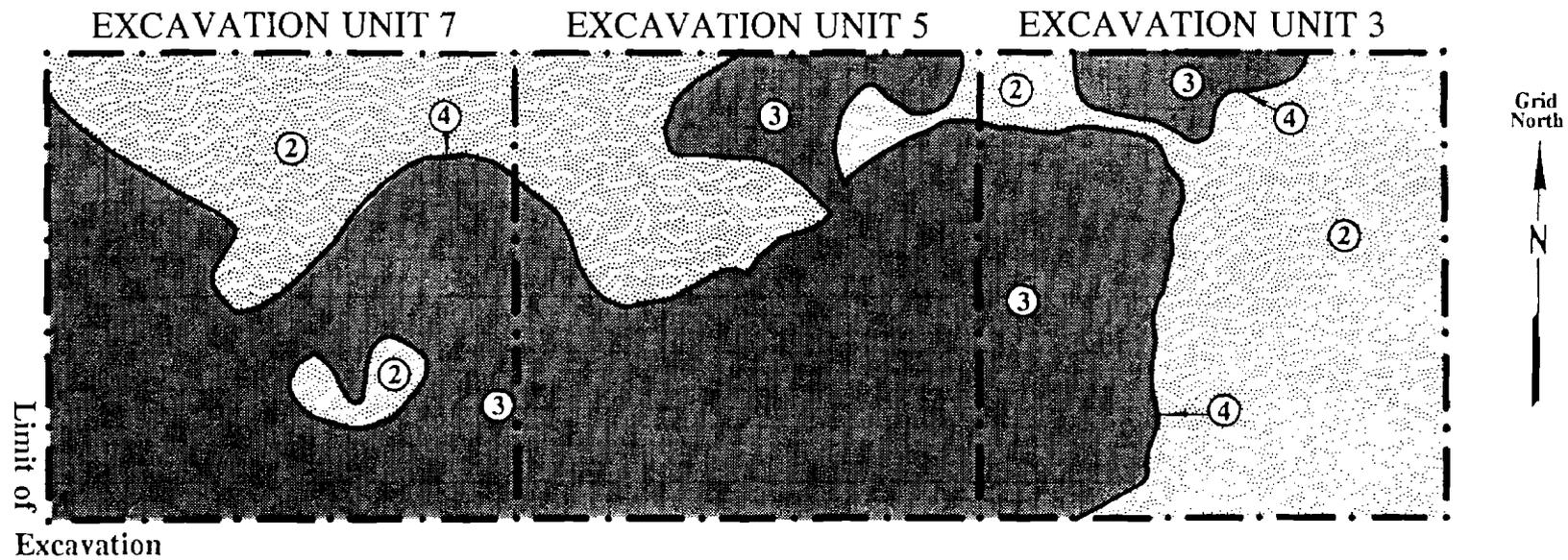


Figure 10.4. Dawson House Site, Excavation Units 1, 6 and 9, Plan View.



Plate 10.1. Area A, Dawson House Site, Excavation Units 3, 5 and 7, Contexts 2 and 3; view facing north showing a dark stain in the vicinity of the malthouse (Photographer: Glen Mellin, March 1995) [HRI Neg. 95015/1-6].



Context	Description	Munsell
2	silty sand	10YR 4/6
3	unexcavated in units 3 & 5 heavily charred sandy loam	10YR 3/2
4	cut of context 3	--

Figure 10.5. Dawson House Site, Excavation Units 3, 5 and 7, Plan View.



Plate 10.2. Area A, Dawson House Site, Excavation Units 1,6 and 9, Contexts 2,3 and 4; view facing north showing a dark stain in the vicinity of the malthouse (Photographer: Glen Mellin, March 1995) [HRI Neg. 95015/1-6].

The deflated plowzone contexts [1 and 2] were fully excavated in all of the shovel tests and excavation units. In most units the plowzone was removed as a single context [1], although in some units it was separated into two contexts -- grass and root mat [1] and the actual soil [2]. A large quantity of mid- to late 18-century artifacts was recovered from the plowzone contexts, with smaller amounts of widely dispersed late 19th-century artifacts, chiefly ceramics and glass, also being found. The late 19th-century artifacts are thought to be unrelated to the Dawson House Site and were probably either typical farm field scatter or were associated with a later structure located nearby to the south, just outside the project corridor. The concentration of artifacts dating from the mid- to late 18th century even within the plowzone, makes this uppermost deposit an important component of the site. No artifacts dating after *circa* 1780 were recovered from contexts identified and sampled below the plowzone.

D. Artifact Analysis

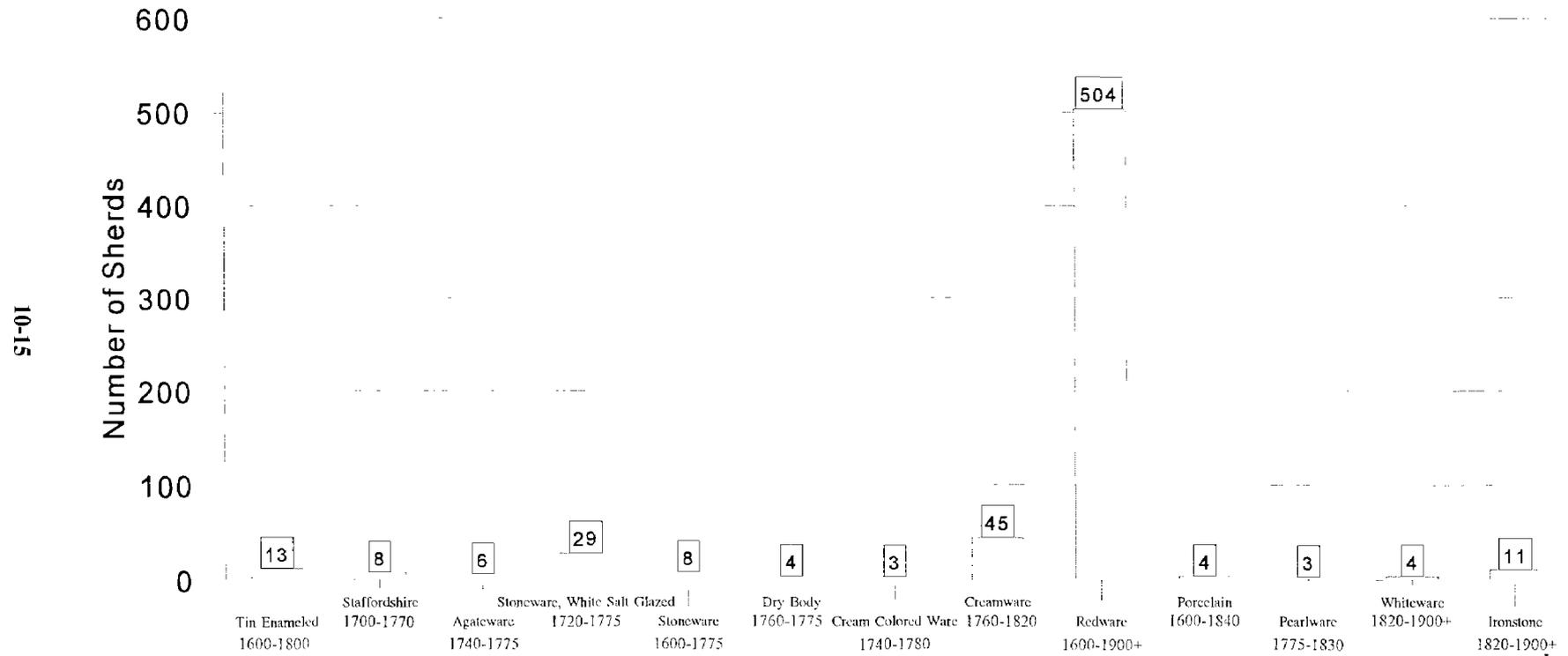
The artifact assemblage recovered from the Phase I and II field investigations at the Dawson House Site is dominated by ceramics. Other diagnostic cultural materials recovered include a brass buckle, fragments of olive green liquor bottles, segments of white clay tobacco pipe stems and wrought nails. Among the identified faunal remains are teeth from pigs and sheep.

The most heavily represented type of ceramics is locally produced utilitarian redware (504 sherds), which accounts for 80% of the total (Figure 10.6). High-class mid- to late 18th-century English ceramics are also present in smaller quantities in the form of pieces of a sprig-molded, dry-bodied redware teapot, sherds of sprig-molded clouded ware, molded white salt-glazed plates, white salt-glazed hollow wares with scratch blue decoration, tin-enameled ware, buff-bodied Staffordshire or "dotware," Jackfield ware, cream-colored ware, and a few sherds of pearlware and cobalt blue decorated grey-bodied stoneware (Figure 10.7). A few sherds of Chinese export porcelain -- material which can be grouped with the English wares since its distribution in the colonies was largely controlled by British merchants -- are also present.

Based primarily on the ceramic materials, the artifact assemblage -- and therefore the occupation of the Dawson House Site -- can be dated to between 1740 and 1780. An ending date of occupation around 1780 may be postulated based on the absence from the assemblage of complex decorated pearlware which was predominantly manufactured post-1780. The very small number of pearlware sherds (a total of three) suggests this ceramic type was only available to occupants of the site for a very short time before its abandonment. This could push the ending date of occupation back before the Revolutionary War era. The four sherds of whiteware and single sherd of ironstone china are seen as later items brought on to the site as field scatter dispersed through plow action.

Figure 10.6

Dawson House Site, Frequency Distribution of Historic Ceramics



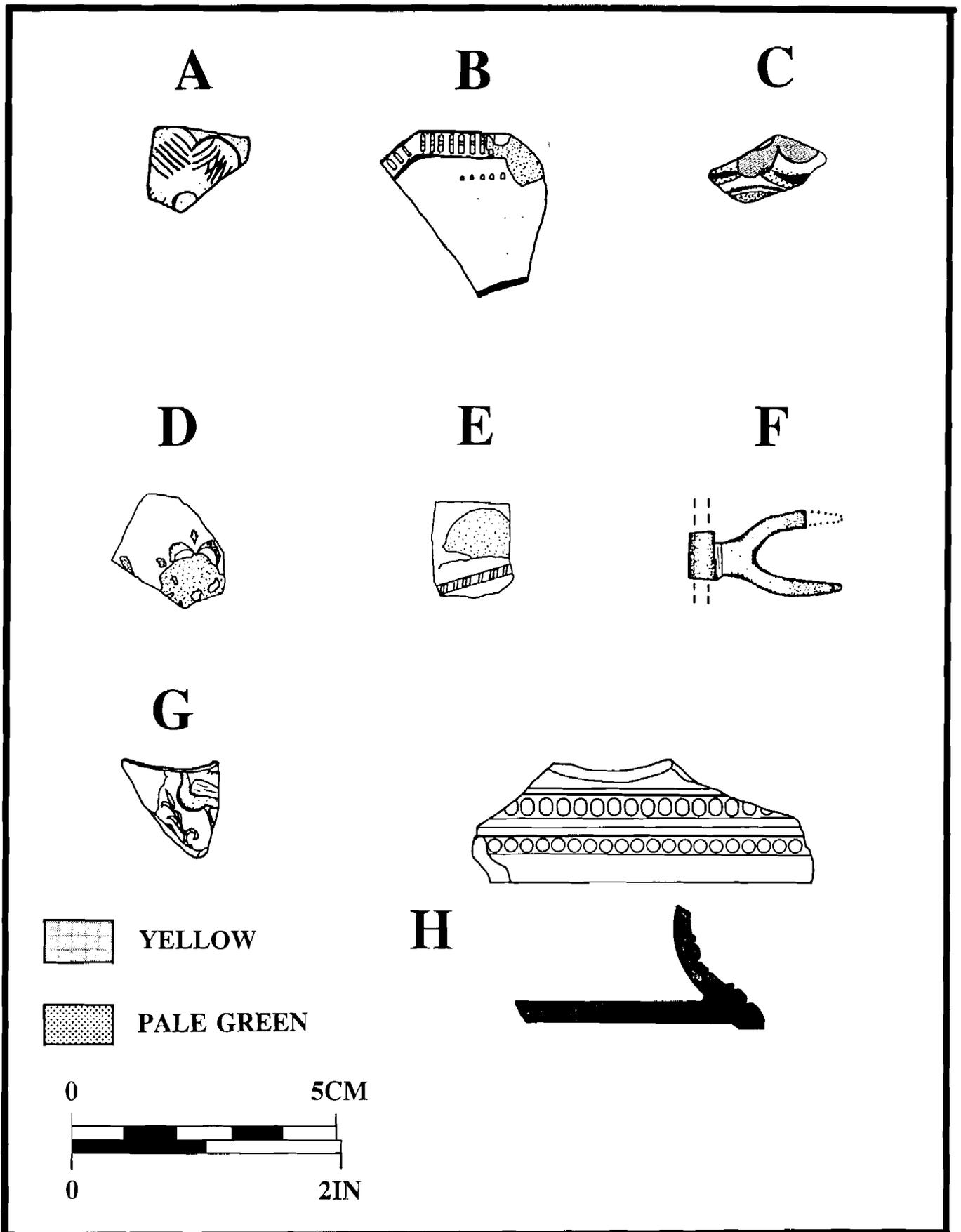


Figure 10.7. Selected 18th-century Artifacts from the Dawson House Site (7K-C-414): A. scratch blue white salt-glazed stoneware bowl sherd [EU 2, context 1]; B. eight-sided molded white salt-glazed stoneware plate rim sherd [EU 2, context 1]; C. hand painted polychrome overglazed white salt-glazed stoneware [EU 5, context 1]; D. hand-painted polychrome tin-enamelled earthenware sherd [EU 2, context 1]; E. molded bead and reel creamware sherd [EU 5, context 1]; F. brass shoe buckle tine [EU 3, context 1]; G. molded herring decoration on a dry-bodied redware teapot body sherd [EU 10, context 2]; H. engine-turned dry-bodied redware hollowware base sherd [EU 3, context 1].

E. Evaluation Of Significance

Based on an integrated assessment of the documentary record and archaeological evidence, the Dawson House Site appears to have originated as the focus of a small farmstead established around 1740 by Thomas Dawson. At its largest during the Dawson tenure, the farm amounted to around 72 acres, and is notable for having included a malthouse adjacent to the dwelling. It would appear the Dawson family was processing some of its own grain crops -- and perhaps some of those grown by neighbors -- into malt for use in making foodstuffs and beverages.

Upon Dawson's death in 1754, the property passed to his son, Richard, who sold it two years later to Thomas Nixon who, by the time of this purchase, had assembled a plantation of some 500 acres. Nixon apparently lived elsewhere on his property, implying that the Dawson House Site was occupied by tenants during the period of his ownership. In 1779, Nixon sold the parcel containing the Dawson House Site to his daughter, Letitia Vandyke, who likewise may have rented out the dwelling or possibly even left it unoccupied. In 1794, the property passed into the Cooper family under whose ownership it remained for roughly a century, during which time it does not appear to have ever contained a functioning dwelling site. The actual date of abandonment of the Dawson House Site remains uncertain although it seem to have occurred around the time of the Revolutionary War. The war itself does not appear to have been a factor in the abandonment of the site; rather, the cessation of occupation seems to coincide with the decline of Thomas Nixon's involvement with the property in the late 1770s and the involvement of his daughter in the 1780s.

Archaeologically, the eastern portion of the Dawson House Site survives to the east of U.S. Route 13. An area measuring approximately 100 meters by 50 meters (5,000 square meters) has been delineated within which relatively intact (slightly plow-damaged) deposits have been identified with cultural materials dating overwhelmingly to the period *circa* 1740-1780. Within this area, a smaller zone has been identified, roughly 1,000 square meters, where there is a heavier concentration of cultural materials. Although only minimally tested, the site includes apparent mid-18th-century features (a robber trench, possibly from a malt oven or outbuilding, and a destruction deposit with charred material). This evidence strongly suggests that the surviving fragment of the site contains information relating to the malting operation that took place on the property. The site of the dwelling is believed to have been largely destroyed and lies beneath the northbound carriageway of U.S. Route 13.

On the basis of the Phase I and II archaeological investigation conducted to date, the Dawson House Site is considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion D as an archaeological resource that has the potential to yield information important in history. The prospect of archaeological data being found that pertains to colonial malting is of exceptional interest. To the best knowledge of this consultant, no other 18th-century farm-based malthouses in Delaware or on the Delmarva peninsula have been previously examined archaeologically; indeed, this can be regarded as a rare find within the entire Mid-Atlantic region. The Dawson House Site thus offers the opportunity of yielding useful data pertinent to the

“agriculture” and “settlement pattern and demographic change” historic themes identified in the Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan, which are rated respectively as the #6 and #1 priority historic themes for below-ground resources (Ames et al. 1989:22-25, 28-29). While the archaeology of colonial agriculture in Delaware’s Upper Peninsula is not rated a top priority research issue in the Management Plan for Delaware’s Historical Archaeological Resources, the Dawson House Site with its rare small-scale agricultural processing facility can help to “illuminate the transition of the colony from a frontier to a commercial agricultural hinterland,” which is one of the stated research goals for the period 1730-1770 (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:130).

F. Assessment Of Impact

Significant archaeological deposits at the Dawson House Site are considered to cover an area measuring approximately 100 meters by 50 meters extending along the U.S. 13 frontage on either side of the northeastern boundary of a proposed stormwater retention basin (Figure 10.3). Approximately half the area of the site lies within the footprint of the proposed basin. The deposits of interest probably extend no more than two to three feet in depth and are close to the present ground surface, lying immediately below a shallow plowzone. Under the current plans, the portion of the site lying within the proposed stormwater retention basin will be adversely affected by the project action; the portion of the site lying just outside the basin footprint, because of its proximity, also runs the risk of being adversely affected unless suitable protective measures are taken during construction. The zone where cultural materials are especially concentrated is contained within this latter portion of the site and is located outside the footprint of the stormwater retention basin.

G. Recommendations

Consideration should initially be given to redesign of the proposed stormwater retention basin to avoid or lessen the effect of the project on the Dawson House Site. If this proves to be feasible, steps should still be taken to protect the Dawson House Site during construction and preserve the resource for future study. Clear demarcation of the site limits and monitoring during construction are two appropriate protective steps to consider here, while long-term preservation of the resource could be enhanced by careful placement of a layer of protective fill, perhaps one to two feet in depth, over the site.

If avoidance of the Dawson House Site is not feasible, the most appropriate means of mitigating the project effects would be to implement a program of data recovery designed to recover the critical archaeological and historical data still intrinsic to the resource. This mitigative activity should include the following components: supplementary documentary research to place the site in a broader historic context and to better understand colonial malting processes; archaeological

excavation to recover spatial, structural, material cultural and environmental information about the site; analysis of recovered data and archaeological materials; technical reporting of the findings; and public outreach initiatives (in the form of popular publications and site visits) to inform the community of the purpose and importance of the data recovery.

In the opinion of this consultant, because the site is relatively self-contained and, under the current plans, at least one half of the resource will be destroyed, it would be appropriate for the data recovery excavations to address the resource as a whole and to include fieldwork in the portion of the site lying outside the right-of-way limits. In this manner, the information yield from the site as a whole can be maximized. In terms of the level of effort for the data recovery excavations, a 20% sample (translating into an excavation area of 200 square meters) is recommended for the core portion of the site where the heaviest concentrations of cultural materials are located. A 5% sample is recommended for the remainder of the site (also translating into an excavation area of 200 square meters). It is recommended that an "open-area" style of excavation be adopted wherein large blocks of contiguous excavation units are opened up, so that spatial patterning, structural remains and features within the site can be examined within a broad physical context.