

CHAPTER 12

OTHER HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

A. Historic Landings in the Vicinity of the Project Corridor

1. Historical Detail

From a deed of 1794 through which Richard Cooper acquired a large 491-acre tract from William Montgomery and Letitia Coakley, at least four landings are known to have existed within the project vicinity on the west side of the St. Jones River and along the lower portion of Puncheon Run during the late 18th century. Two of the four landings are named. Starkey's Landing was located on the west side of the St. Jones River about 1,000 feet north of the project corridor, while Robert Clark's Landing was situated south of the corridor on the south or right bank of Puncheon Run (at this time known as Walker's Branch) approximately 1,200 feet west of its confluence with the St. Jones. The other two unnamed landing sites are both located within the project corridor. One was positioned to the north northwest of Clark's Landing, on the opposite side of Walker's Branch, and these two transshipment points could possibly have been linked by a ford. The other landing was located to the northeast on the northeast tip of the peninsula within the project corridor (see above, Figure 10.2) (Kent County Deed E-2 139).

2. Field Investigation

Only the two unnamed historic landing sites located within or immediately adjacent to the project corridor were subjected to archaeological field investigation.

The landing site on the north side of Puncheon Run opposite the site of Robert Clark's Landing is situated on the southern edge of the project corridor approximately 1,700 feet upstream from the original confluence of Puncheon Run and the St. Jones River and 1,900 feet upstream from the present-day confluence (within Locus 2 of Prehistoric Site 7K-C-51). This section of Puncheon Run is now heavily silted and unsuitable for navigation. Water flows very slowly and circuitously from this point to the mouth of the run. The bulk of the sediment build-up in the valley floor is probably the result of extensive cultivation of the adjoining terrace landforms and related run-off over a period of more than 200 years.

Unlike the Nixon Fulling Mill Site some 200 feet further upstream, portions of which are believed to lie preserved beneath the silts (see above, Chapter 11), the landing site on the north bank of Puncheon Run is situated on a bend of the creek where extensive erosion rather than sediment deposition appears to have taken place (Figure 12.1). The run cuts sharply into the rim of the adjoining bluff in the approximate location of the landing site. The minor topographic anomaly at the foot of the bluff in the approximate location of the landing seems to be related to deposition

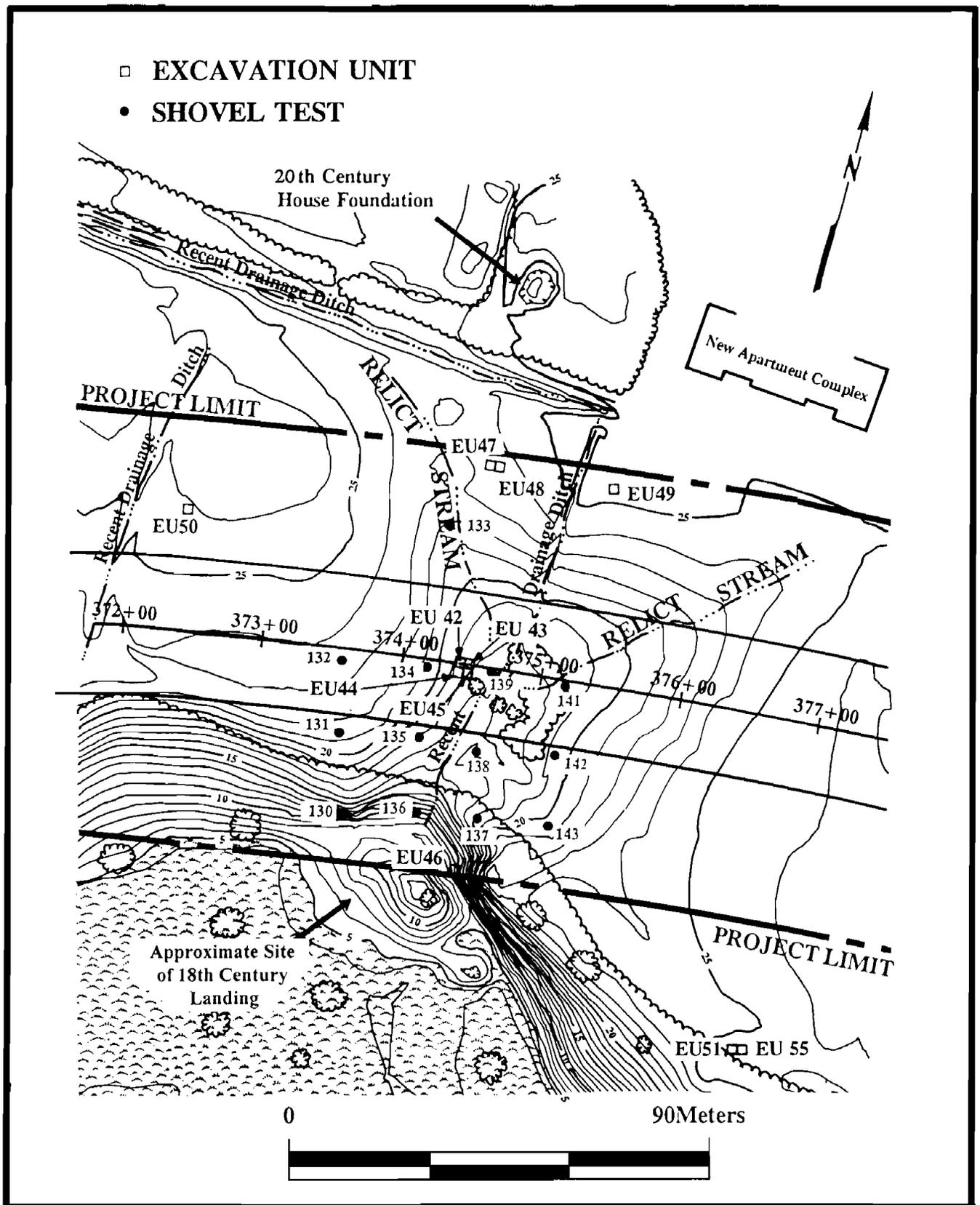


Figure 12.1. Project Plans Showing Locations of Subsurface Tests in the Vicinity of the Site of an 18th Century Landing and a 20th Century House Foundation.

from the minor relict stream and drainage ditch that empties into the Puncheon Run valley and is not directly cultural in origin. A total of 12 shovel tests (ST# 130-139 and 141-143) and one one-meter-square excavation unit (EU# 46) were placed in the area where the landing is believed to have been located (Figure 12.1). No evidence of structural remains relating to the landing (e.g., timber pilings or planking) was observed and no historic artifacts were found.

The other landing site within the project corridor is located on the northeastern tip of the peninsula on the west side of the St. Jones River immediately north of station 391+00 (within Locus 3 of Prehistoric Site 7K-C-51). Field inspection showed that this area has been radically altered as a result of excavations within a large sand and gravel borrow pit. Five shovel tests (ST# 297, 298, 303, 304 and 309) and one one-meter-square excavation unit (EU# 37) were placed in the approximate location of the landing site (see above, Figure 7.6). These tests confirmed the removal and disturbance of cultural stratigraphy along this portion of the peninsula landform. No evidence of structural remains relating to the landing (e.g., timber pilings or planking) was observed and no historic artifacts were found.

3. Evaluation of Significance

Neither of the two historic landing sites located within and immediately adjacent to the project corridor on the western side of the St. Jones River has yielded intact archaeological deposits or historic cultural materials. Both sites appear to have been largely destroyed through river erosion and, in the case of the site on the peninsula on the west side of the St. Jones River, by sand and gravel mining. There is some possibility that deeper-buried traces of the landing on the north side of Puncheon Run may survive on the floodplain fringe, but such remains would lie just outside the project corridor limits and beyond the area of potential project effect. Neither landing site survives in a substantial enough form to be considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. No further archaeological study of these resources is considered necessary in connection with the proposed highway construction.

B. Midden Deposit within Prehistoric Site 7K-C-51, Locus 1

1. Historical Detail

The location of the midden deposit described below lies within property that was owned by the Nixon family from 1743 until 1794. This same property contained the fulling mill built by Thomas Nixon on Puncheon Run (Walker's Branch) sometime in the 1750s. The property then passed into the hands of Richard Cooper in 1794 (Kent County Deed E-2 139) and later included within its bounds a sawmill, which possibly re-used the site of the earlier fulling mill. Primary documents and historic maps make no reference to structures or other cultural features in the approximate location of the midden deposit (see above, Chapters 5 and 11, Section A).

2. Field Investigations

When first encountered through subsurface testing, this site was initially thought to be a late 18th/early 19th-century domestic site. This deduction was based chiefly on the excavation of ST#73 which cut into a dark organic soil deposit containing creamware sherds, cut nails and early 19th-century vessel glass fragments. No structural remains were noted, but a series of tests using a split-spoon auger was successful in roughly delimiting the horizontal extent of the dark soils which were observable as a distinct stratum directly below the plowzone (see above, Figure 7.2).

Excavation Units 2-6 were placed around ST#73 within the area of the dark organic soils. These units confirmed the presence directly below the plowzone of an extensive, organically rich soil layer with historic artifacts. The limits of the deposit were irregular and even though the soils appeared partially stratified, the cultural materials contained within the matrix were temporally mixed. Cultural materials recovered from EU#s 2-6 include historic artifacts such as sherds of redware, whiteware and yellowware, and brick fragments, as well as modern building debris and refuse such as tar-paper, shingles, burnt wood, galvanized wire roofing nails, iron water pipes and coal.

Rather than being the cultural feature of historic domestic origin that was first suspected, the dark organic deposit -- following the more extended field investigation -- was interpreted as a natural gully which had been deliberately filled in with mixed fill probably brought in from elsewhere on the farm property. Significantly, an aerial photograph of 1937 shows a dark patch in this location which appears to represent a line of trees in and along a gully. On the basis of this aerial photograph and the recovered artifact assemblage, the gully appears to have been filled at some point after 1937, most likely using mechanical earthmoving equipment.

3. Evaluation of Significance

The mixed midden deposit interpreted as 20th-century fill within a small gully contained with Locus 1 of prehistoric Site 7K-C-51 is not considered archaeologically or historically significant. No further archaeological study of this deposit is considered necessary in connection with the proposed highway construction.

C. Pyott House Site

1. Historical Detail

As with the midden site noted above, between 1743 and 1794, this site would have been located on lands formerly owned by the Nixon family (Kent County Deed E-2 139). From 1794 until 1855, this location was part of property held by the Cooper family (Kent County Will P-1 131). In the latter year, William Parren Cooper sold off a parcel containing the site to William R.

Morris (Kent County Deed I-4 117). The Beers map of 1868 (Figure 5.2) shows Morris' residence as being located about a quarter of a mile to the north of Puncheon Run, further to the north of the site under discussion here and closer to the U.S. Route 13 highway. No buildings are shown on the Beers map in the vicinity of the project corridor in this area.

William R. Morris died around the turn of the century. In October of 1900, 125 acres of his estate, including both his residence and the area adjoining to the south and east, was sold at a sheriff's sale to Walter Morris (Kent County Deed I-8 183). William's relationship to Walter is uncertain, but they may have been father and son. Two months later Walter and his wife, Anna Louise Morris, sold the property to Robert Morris (Kent County Deed I-8 399). The 125-acre property remained within the Morris family until 1916 when it was divided into three parcels. The site of the house foundation under examination here fell within a 36 acre parcel sold to Annie J. Pyott (Kent County Deed Z-10 62). This latter property was bounded on the east by the St. Jones River, on the west by State Street, and on the north by a 20-acre parcel, also part of the original 125-acre tract. To the south were two lots, one owned by Samuel Hall, the other by Clara Clark, Puncheon Run lying to the south.

In the following year, Annie Pyott expanded her holdings to 56 acres by buying the northernmost 20-acre parcel to the north (Kent County Deed C-11 492). The Pyott family owned this property into the mid-20th century. An aerial photograph of 1937 (not illustrated) shows the area in the general vicinity of the Pyott House Site as being under cultivation, indicating that a house had yet to be built in this vicinity (United States Department of Agriculture 1937: frame AHP-51-87). A second aerial photograph (not illustrated; post-dating 1950, possibly *circa* 1976) clearly shows a building at this location, suggesting that the house here was constructed sometime after 1937, most likely by the Pyott family (Wapora 1976).

2. Field Investigation

The Pyott House Site is located north of station 374+00, approximately 100 feet outside the project corridor right-of-way (Figure 12.1). No subsurface testing was undertaken in the immediate vicinity of the Pyott House Site, since it lay outside the project corridor. However, a possible builders' trench for some sort of small structure or outbuilding was identified just within the corridor immediately below the plowzone in Excavation Unit 49. Artifacts recovered from the plowzone and possible builders trench in this unit include sherds of whiteware and redware, fragments of olive green wine/spirits bottle glass and clear lamp chimney glass, and a cut nail. Remains of chicken bone and shells were also recovered. This small assemblage can be broadly dated to the mid- to late 19th century and therefore does not appear to be associated with the occupation of the Pyott House Site. It may be related to a remote outbuilding in use during the period of Morris family ownership of the property.

3. Evaluation of Significance

The remains of the Pyott House Site, which lie outside the project corridor, are of mid-20th-century date and are not considered historically or archaeologically significant. The archaeological materials recovered from Excavation Unit 49, although of earlier date, are unexceptional and are interpreted as isolated remains possibly associated with the Morris family period of ownership. They are not considered to be of a caliber suitable for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

D. Historic Site K1003 (Richter House Site 1)

1. Historical Detail

The designation Site K1003 was assigned to a recently demolished dwelling that was constructed around 1900. The dwelling was depicted on a U.S. Geological Survey topographic map of 1906 and was shown on the construction plans for U.S. Route 113 in 1934 as a two-story frame house with a small porch fronting the highway (see above, Figures 5.3 and 5.5). The owner of the property in 1934 was W.H. Richter. An aerial photograph of 1937 shows that the dwelling was part of a small farmstead complex which also contained three barns, a possible carriage house or barn, and an unidentified outbuilding. The three barns and outbuilding were located to the southwest of the house, while the possible carriage house or barn was located to the south of the house, just outside the project limits. Construction plans for U.S. Route 113 in 1958 show the house as a two-and-a-half-story frame dwelling, still owned by William Richter (see above, Figure 5.8). Also shown on the property at this time, to the north northeast of site K1003, are two additional buildings: a one-story frame produce stand with a semi-circular dirt drive and a one-and-a-half-story frame dwelling, further to the northwest (see below, Section E).

The Richter house was still standing in 1986 when it was noted during an architectural survey along U.S. Route 113. The building was identified as a two-and-a-half-story, rectangular-plan, three-bay frame dwelling, with an attached shed at the rear. The basement foundation was constructed of cement block (Delaware State Historic Preservation Office site maps and files).

2. Field Investigation

The location of the Richter house was not identified in the initial "pass" of shovel testing because of the wide testing interval that was employed. However, following careful measurement based on the construction plans for U.S. Route 113 in 1934 and 1958 (see above, Figures 5.5 and 5.8) and additional testing in an area displaying subtle changes in the grassy vegetation, the dwelling site was finally identified some 450 feet north of Presidential Drive on the west side of U.S. Route 113 (Plate 12.1). A single two-by-0.5-meter excavation unit (EU# 1) was excavated to explore



Plate 12.1. Area C, view facing north showing Historic Site K1003 (Richter House Site 1); the footprint of the house is outlined with flagging tape (Photographer: Frank Dunsmore, August 1994) [HRI Neg. 94015/1-13].

the integrity of the site. Based on the excavation results, it appears that the building burned down and was then demolished, with the demolition debris being bulldozed into the basement. The basement fill contained recent trash, charred planks and a hot water heater, not more than 25 years old.

3. Evaluation of Significance

The Richter house was built around 1900 and demolished within the past decade. This site is not considered archaeologically or historically significant. No further historical or archaeological study of this site is considered necessary in connection with the proposed highway construction.

E. Richter House Site 2

1. Historical Detail

This is the site of a second dwelling owned by William Richter and is therefore associated with Historic Site K1003 (Richter House Site 1). The construction plans for U.S. Route 113 prepared in 1958 show a one-and-a-half story frame dwelling owned by William Richter to the northwest of Richter's earlier dwelling on this property (see above, Figure 5.8). Since this house is not shown on the construction plans prepared for U.S. Route 113 in 1934 (see above, Figure 5.5), it was probably constructed sometime between 1934 and 1958. The dwelling was probably razed around the same time as the earlier Richter house in the late 1980s.

2. Field Investigation

This site was identified during field testing some 135 feet north of site K1003 along U.S. Route 113 (Plate 12.2). A single two-by-0.5-meter excavation unit (EU# 2) was excavated to explore the integrity of the house site. It appears from the excavations that the building was abandoned and subsequently demolished. The site was then bulldozed, with demolition debris being pushed into the existing basement. The basement fill contained recent trash not more than 15 years old, and included materials such as plastic berry baskets, aluminum beer cans and a syringe. The unit exposed a set of poured concrete steps leading down into the basement.

3. Evaluation of Significance

This mid-20th-century domestic site is not considered archaeologically or historically significant. No further historical or archaeological study of this site is considered necessary in connection with the proposed highway construction.

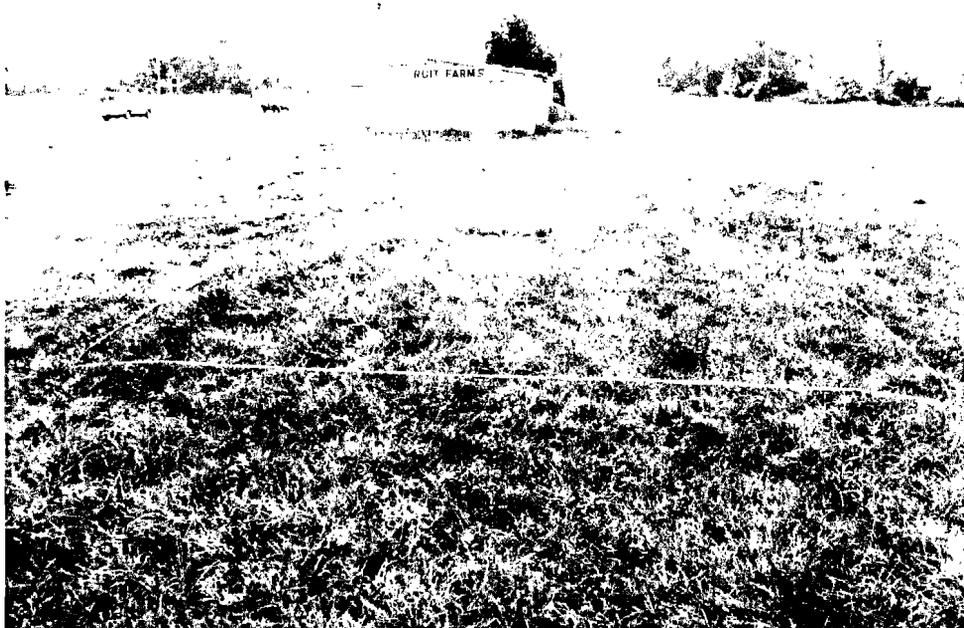


Plate 12.2. Area C, view facing south showing the Richter House Site 2; the footprint of the house, erected in the mid-20th century, is outlined with flagging tape (Photographer: Frank Dunsmore, August 1994) [HRI Neg. 94015/1-21].

F. Historic Site K1004 (Becker/Danner House Site)

1. Historical Detail

Historic Site K1004 is in fact located outside the Puncheon Run project corridor, 200 feet north of Presidential Drive, on the west side of U.S. Route 113; this property is located incorrectly on the site maps of the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office. The Beers map of 1868 (Figure 5.2) shows a building in this location owned and probably occupied by W.H. Becker. The construction plans prepared for U.S. Route 113 in 1934 (see above, Figure 5.5) show that the site contained a two-story frame house with a porch that extended the full width of the building on its roadside frontage. The property owner at this time was Ellis Danner. An aerial photograph of 1937 shows that the dwelling was the domestic focus of a small farmstead complex which also included two barns and perhaps as many as three outbuildings all set back slightly further from the road to the southwest of the house. Construction plans prepared for U.S. Route 113 in 1958 (see above, Figure 5.8) show the house as a two-and-a-half-story frame dwelling. A farm stand in the form of a corrugated metal shed is shown to the north of the house. The property owner's name is not shown on the plan. The house was evidently still standing in the mid-1980s, since it was recorded during a historic architectural survey conducted at this time as a two-and-a-half-story, L-plan, five-bay frame house with a brick foundation, built around 1860 (Delaware State Historic Preservation Office site maps and files).

2. Field Investigation

No testing was conducted at the Becker/Danner House Site, since it lies outside the project corridor limits.

3. Evaluation of Significance

No evaluation of the historical or archaeological significance of the Becker/Danner House Site is offered, since it lies outside the project corridor limits. The site will not be affected by the proposed project actions. No further historical or archaeological study of this site is considered necessary in connection with the proposed highway construction.