

ABSTRACT

This report documents research to identify the presence, nature, integrity and National Register eligibility of physical components of the infrastructure of the Woodland Ferry across the Nanticoke River in Woodland, southwest Sussex County, Delaware. The undertaking requiring cultural resource studies was the proposed replacement of the existing ferry vessel and consequent improvements and replacements of the ramps and pilings on each side of the river. The ferry is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The survey was accomplished through background research, onshore and underwater remote sensing, and subsurface testing.

James Cannon probably started Cannon's Ferry between 1734 and 1748. It was certainly in existence in 1766 and has a continuous history since that time. The Cannon family were notorious and unpopular in the area in the late 18th and early 19th century for their rapacious behavior: Jacob Cannon was shot to death at the ferry wharf in 1843 as a consequence of a local dispute. Patty and Jesse Cannon, second cousins to Jacob, were heavily involved in the slave trade in adjacent areas of Maryland. After passing through the hands of Cannon relatives after 1843, the ferry became the responsibility of the Sussex County Levy Court in 1883, which continued to operate it until 1935 when the State of Delaware took over the property.

Archaeological investigations comprised onshore and underwater remote sensing, and subsurface testing through shovel testing and excavation units. These showed that the Area of Potential Effect of the undertaking was largely comprised of modern fill materials and recent structural components, although one soil context was identified that contained a range of artifactual material that had apparently accumulated more gradually from the mid-19th century onwards.

It is concluded that the undertaking would have no adverse effect on significant archaeological resources, although the overall effect of the replacement of the ferryboat and the improvement to the ramps and pilings was considered to be adverse. Consequently, the Delaware Department of Transportation will publish a booklet on the history and significance of the ferry in order to mitigate this effect.

The report offers some observations on developing specific National Register-eligibility documentation for the ferry, and includes some comparative material from other states where ferries have been listed on the National Register.