

Introduction: The Wilson Farm Tenancy Site (7NC-F-94)

Phase III archaeological data-recovery excavations were conducted at the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site (7NC-F-94), a National Register-eligible site located west of Middletown, New Castle County, Delaware (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). The Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) funded the project prior to the widening of Choptank Road/State Route (SR) 15, to the northwest of Middletown. Because the proposed highway work is, in part, funded by the federal government, the project was subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), as amended. Section 106 requires the federal agency funding or permitting the work (in this case, the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA]) to take into account the effects of their activities on historic properties, including archaeological sites.¹ DelDOT contracted with a cultural resource consulting firm (initially McCormick Taylor [MTA] and subsequently KSK) to conduct cultural resource survey for the proposed project.

MTA archaeologists identified the Wilson Site during their Phase I survey in 2001. The site was referred to as MTA 11, in the Creek Test Area, and was listed as possibly requiring additional work, but was not included among the 15 sites recommended for further investigation. When KSK assumed responsibility for the project in 2003, one of the areas they decided to take a closer look at was MTA's Creek Test Area. Part of this area was now termed KSK 14, located to either side of a tributary of Great Bohemia Creek.

KSK's Phase I background research uncovered evidence from several historic maps that a dwelling or farmstead, owned by a family named Wilson, had existed during the late nineteenth century within—or in close proximity to—the proposed limits of construction for Choptank Road (Morrell and Glumac 2008:36). The last map to show a building in this area is a 1931 United States Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangle. This explained MTA's findings and indicated a high potential for finding additional historic archaeological remains in the area intended for the expanded roadway. Environmental data, principally the *Soil Survey of New Castle County, Delaware* (Matthews and Lavoie 1970), suggested that the project area also possessed a moderate-to-high potential for pre-Contact archaeological resources, an assessment based on the presence of relatively well-drained soils in close proximity to a watercourse (the tributary of Great Bohemia Creek), an attractive setting for Native American groups. It is not unusual to find some evidence of both Native American and European American occupation at the same site, as the environmental variables that attracted Native Americans to this sort of location would probably have drawn European settlers, as well.

Once in the field, KSK's assessment of archaeological potential was borne out. The field team located a historical archaeological site during the Phase I survey—a concentration of artifacts, mostly late-nineteenth-century material that extended up the slope south of the stream. This material consisted largely of architecturally related items like window glass, nails (most of the identifiable nails are wire), and brick, as well as of kitchen-related artifacts like ceramics and

1. For more information on the Section 106 process, visit The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website (<http://www.achp.gov/work106.html>) and the National Park service web site (<http://www.nps.gov/nr/>).

bottle glass. KSK also recovered two pre-Contact artifacts, both found near the top of the slope just to the south of the historic concentration. Based on the presence of this material—the historic artifacts in particular—it was obvious that more fieldwork was needed to properly evaluate the site. Following DelDOT review of the Phase I results, KSK began the Phase II evaluation phase of work at 7NC-F-94 in the fall of 2005.

KSK's fieldwork indicated that the site was occupied during the last quarter of the nineteenth century until its abandonment sometime in the first half of the twentieth (Morrell and Glumac 2008:77), an assessment based, in part, on the datable ceramic and glass fragments recovered, and other items with known dates of manufacture, as well as on the historic maps examined during the Phase I survey. With ceramics, bottle glass, and other household-related artifacts making up close to 40% of the objects recovered, not to mention the variety of clothing and personal artifacts collected, it was clear that Site 7NC-F-94 had once been the location of a dwelling. Reinforcing this conclusion was the discovery of two features apparently associated with the remains of a house. One, a mortared brick wall designated Feature 15, extended in an east-west direction perpendicular to Choptank Road. The second, Feature 16, was an identical brick wall, located 16 feet to the south and parallel with Feature 15, and evidently part of the same structure. A combination of excavation and soil probing indicated that the structure measured approximately 16 x 26 feet, with its long axis perpendicular to the road (Morrell and Glumac 2008).

The results of KSK's Phase II investigations indicated that the site contained evidently intact historic period archaeological deposits representing a fairly short duration of occupation (perhaps about 50 years). This occurrence is comparatively rare, since most historic sites were occupied for considerably longer periods, often by successive, unrelated households. Long-term continual occupation often results in extensive changes to an archaeological site as buildings are constructed, then razed; soils are reworked as properties are landscaped; new construction intrudes into earlier deposits. All of this activity can create an extremely complicated site, difficult to read and interpret, where archaeological deposits associated with a particular household are virtually non-existent. Fortunately, this did not appear to be the case for the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site.

In addition to documenting the site's integrity, KSK's archaeologists also speculated that it might have been occupied by tenant farmers or farm laborers. This notion was based on the small size of the dwelling, its position on the landscape close to a public road, and the generally low-cost nature of the recovered artifacts. One intriguing find was a metal hair-straightening comb with a "Kentucky Maid" makers mark (patent date 1894). This style of comb, called a pressing comb, is still in production and is advertised as a product commonly used by the African American community. The possibility that Site 7NC-F-94 was associated with tenant farmers or farm laborers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that some or all of its occupants may have been African American, made this site something of a rare find. As Morrell and Glumac note (2008:77), only a handful of agriculture-related sites from this time period have been investigated in New Castle County, and only a few sites occupied by tenants, wage laborers, or African Americans have been excavated in northern Delaware. Given the site's integrity, and its potential to yield data important in history (in this case, information regarding subsistence and consumer practices of turn of the century tenant families in Delaware), KSK

recommended that the site be considered eligible for the NRHP. Although not explicitly stated in KSK's report, the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site was considered eligible under Criterion D.

Both DelDOT and the DE SHPO agreed with KSK's assessment, and the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site was determined eligible in June 2006. Because the site could not be avoided by redesigning the project, the DE SHPO determined that there would be an adverse effect to the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site. A memorandum of agreement (MOA) was drawn up between the FHWA and DelDOT—in consultation with the DE SHPO—that laid out the course of action to be taken to mitigate adverse effects to Site 7NC-F-94. DelDOT agreed to develop and implement a treatment plan for the site, to consist of data-recovery excavations and a public-involvement program that included a media day and an artifact display.

KSK conducted the data-recovery field investigations beginning in March 2007 and continuing into May 2007; the site was briefly revisited in August of that year. However, KSK terminated its archaeology program prior to completion of the project. URS Corporation completed laboratory analysis, report preparation, and the development of an artifact display under contract to Hunter Research.

All work conducted for the Wilson Farm Tenancy Site data-recovery project was carried out in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; 36 CFR Part 800, particularly sections 800.4, 800.5, and 800.6; as well as the DE SHPO's *Guidelines for Architectural and Archaeological Surveys in Delaware* (1993). The cultural resource specialists who performed the investigations meet or exceed the criteria outlined in 36 CFR 66.3(b)(2) and 36 CFR 61.