

ABSTRACT

The Dawson Family Site was a lucky survivor. The farm, built by Thomas and Mary Dawson some time before 1740, was located near a major road intersection just south of Dover, Delaware. The farm was abandoned around 1780, but its attractive location saw many different kinds of development over the next two centuries. A large horse farm was built nearby in the later 1800s, and a horse racing track was built just south of the Dawson Site in the 1920s. A few years later, a brick house was built just north of the Dawson Site. Improvements to the nearby roads, especially the construction of new U.S. 13 in the 1950s, destroyed the western half of the site. In the 1980s, improvements to South State Street on the east side of the site resulted in further damage; the modern brick house just north of the site was torn down, and photographs of the site taken at the time show it as bare earth torn by the tracks of giant earth-moving machines. Despite all this activity, remains of the Dawsons' humble farm survived. In 1995, excavators from Hunter Research, Inc., found eighteenth-century artifacts in a grassy field along U.S. 13. Two years later The Louis Berger Group, Inc., conducted test excavations on the site, and they determined that features dating to the 1740 to 1780 period were still present. Large-scale excavations were carried out between November 1997 and February 1998. During these excavations, a cellar hole measuring 11.6 by 13.8 feet was exposed and excavated. No other building remains were found, but several pits containing eighteenth-century artifacts were excavated. The site yielded more than 14,000 colonial artifacts and more than 6,000 animal bones. Study of these remains has helped us understand the lives of ordinary Delaware farmers like the Dawsons.

This report is intended to describe the excavations at the Dawson Family Site and our scientific findings in a way that is both useful to other professionals and interesting to anyone who cares about Delaware history. This report is only one part of our effort to publicize the findings from the Dawson Site. Our interpretive program has also included newspaper articles, television appearances, and display boards. Taking advantage of the site's prominent location on U.S. 13, road signs inviting the public to tour the site were put up and a kiosk was constructed to display posters and other interpretative material. More than 200 people toured the site during the excavations.