

A SPAN FOR THE FUTURE BRIDGES THE PAST

In November 1998, construction was underway for DelDOT’s planned replacement of Bridge 3-936 over Cedar Creek in Sussex County, when a construction worker, installing a silt fence, uncovered a brick foundation.

PROJECT LOCATION

DelDOT’s bridge replacement project was located in northern Sussex County along Road 214, directly south of Road 207, at the north end of Bridge 3-936, traversing Cedar Creek in northern Sussex County. The Cubbage Pond Mill project area encompasses approximately one-quarter acre.

BEGINNING THE ARCHEOLOGICAL PROCESS

DelDOT called their cultural resources (Archeology) contractor and requested an immediate Phase I survey of the project area. A Phase I (Identification) survey--a preliminary analysis--consists of site reconnaissance, photographs, background research, and map studies to determine whether a project area contains archeological resources. Phase I research indicated that the construction crew could well have uncovered the brick foundation of one of Delaware’s earliest gristmills, and that Phase II (Evaluation) investigations were likely warranted. Phase II investigations (systematic archeological testing, detailed historical research), recorded the exceptional integrity and archeological importance of the site that rendered it eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Following completion of Phase II work, an intensive Phase III mitigation (treatment) was required to thoroughly document and record the Cubbage Pond through detailed archeological excavations before the road crews could resume construction in this portion of the project area. The purpose of Phase III work was to uncover, through archeological techniques, the important information that the site contained prior to bridge construction, which essentially would destroy any trace of the mill site.

The buried gristmill qualified as significant industrial archeological site (*Site 7S-C-61)—a location that contains valuable information about the people and places of the past, their lifeways, skills, knowledge, and response to change. Few mills have been studied in Delaware’s Lower Coastal Plain, and because most mills were abandoned by the early-20th century, documentation of the Cubbage Mill Site has advanced our interpretation of early industry in this portion of the state during the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th century.

* See page 2 to learn how to decode archeological site numbers.

HOW TO DECODE AN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE NUMBER

EXAMPLE: Site **7S-C-61**

- 7** Delaware is 7th in an alphabetical listing of the 50 states
- S** Sussex County (NC = New Castle; K = Kent)
- C** In a Lettered-grid of Sussex County, this Site is in Block C
- 61** Cabbage Mill is the 61st Site Recorded in Sussex County

INTRODUCTION

Tracking down and deciphering clues to an archeological puzzle are specialties of the archeologist, historian, and specialized analysts. Once highway workers uncovered the foundation, historians immediately began “mining” the Delaware State Archives-Hall of Records, and Sussex County Courthouse documents to learn more about past occupations at the site—who lived and worked there, and when.

MINING THE ARCHIVES: HISTORICAL RESEARCH

The first step in the historical investigation of a site like Cabbage Mill is to conduct background research. This research reveals what has been discovered before, and suggests further avenues of inquiry. The background research is then pieced together with the physical results of the archeological field investigation to produce as complete a history of the site as possible.

The archeologist/historian usually begins his research with some basic questions, which guide the research process throughout the investigation. Among the most important research questions for the Cabbage Mill site were:

- 1 What were the date(s) of construction for the mill?
- 2 What was the chronology of the mill’s ownership?
- 3 How did Cabbage Mill compare with other similar gristmills from various time periods within the project vicinity and Sussex County?

Delaware is fortunate in the richness of its historical records and in the degree to which they have been preserved on both the local and state levels. Research on the history of the Cabbage Mill site was greatly facilitated by the ease with which records dating back to the early 18th century are accessed.

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

The Delaware State Archives-Hall of Records, located in Dover, is the principal repository of records relating to the history of Delaware and its three counties. They possess either original or copied versions of most of the legal and primary source records used in the research of the Cabbage Mill site. Historic maps, newspapers, insurance policies, cemetery records, photographs, journals, diaries, and US Census Schedules (Population and Manufacturing) are also kept at the Hall of Records.

GATHERING THE CLUES: RESEARCH METHODS

Figure 2.1. From 1868 Atlas of the State of Delaware, Beers and Pomeroy

The Sussex County Courthouse in Georgetown also holds either originals or copies of most of the legal records relating to the ownership of the Cabbage Mill property. These include deeds, wills, surveys, Orphan’s Court records, probate records and inventories, Levy Court records, Chancery Court proceedings, county commissioner’s minutes, and land tax assessment records.

The Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, located at 15 The Green in Dover, serves as the State’s Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). They maintain a statewide inventory of archeological and historic architectural site files, National Register nominations, and cultural resource management reports available for review by the public. This information provided valuable contextual background for this study.

Historical societies often contain valuable information not always available at the above-named repositories. The Historical Society of Delaware in Wilmington is a valuable source for family history and Delaware genealogy. The Milford Historical Society, and the Milford and Georgetown branches of the Sussex County Library possess vertical files on individuals of local importance. For contextual information on milling and industry in the United States, the preeminent source is the Hagley Museum and Library, located outside Wilmington. The Library of Congress was researched for general reference works, as well.

SOURCES

The historian never lacked for research sources, either primary or secondary, during this project. Legal records, including deed and will records, were the principal source for tracing the long and sometimes complex ownership of this mill site back to the early 18th century. This chain-of-title was supplemented by Orphan’s Court records, court proceedings and civil suits, probate records and inventories, road papers, mill petitions, insurance records, land tax assessments, US Census Schedules (both Population and Manufacturing), birth and death records, cemetery records, biographies, family genealogies, land grants, and surveys.

Historic maps and atlases, business directories, newspapers, and descriptions in published histories of Delaware and Sussex County served to confirm ownership information. The most important published history is undoubtedly *History of Delaware* by Thomas Scharf. Published in 1888, it remains the most authoritative source on Delaware and local history for the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. In addition, there are published histories of Sussex County and Milford.

A visual record of the mill and its appearance is elusive until the early 20th century. Several excellent photographs from 1900-1950 document the mill’s appearance at various dates and on the eve of its demolition. No drawings are

known to exist of the interior or of the workings of the mill, so its methods of operation are surmised from the documentary sources cited above.

LOCAL INFORMANTS TELL THEIR STORY

History is often handed down from generation to generation through story-telling. Historians interview long-time residents (called "local informants") for the information that their knowledge, memories, and often pictures, can contribute. Their information is then combined with archeological results to provide a better understanding of the site's history.



Photo 2.1 1910-1915 Cabbage Mill (Photo Courtesy of Betty Cofer).

Archeologists learned a great deal from their informants--they also provided the "human element" of the mill's history that was often lacking in static documents and records. Mrs. Annie King remembered bringing corn to the mill to be ground into chicken feed during the 1930s and 1940s, while Mr. Ernest Fitzgeralds, Mr. Albert Ladd, and Mr. Harry Wilkins remembered delivering wheat to the mill to be ground into flour during this period.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE "FEEDSACK"

Copyright 1997, Jane Clark Stapel



"The history of the cloth bag started in the early years of settling what later became the United States. At that time food staples, grain, seed, and animal feed were packed in tins, boxes, and wooden barrels. However, tin cans rusted and barrels wore out, allowing pests to get at the products within. Both of these forms of storage were also awkward to transport. They required a wagon and horses or mules, something many farmers or widows of farmers did not have. How much easier to toss a bag of feed over the back of a horse! The problem, however, was that no one could sew a seam strong enough to hold the content of the bag.

The solution came in 1846 with the invention of the sewing machine which made it possible to sew seams to make the sacks secure. From about the 1880s through the 1940s the bags, as much as the products they contained, became hotly advertised items.

The terms "feedbags" or "feedsacks" are not totally accurate. According to Anna Lue Cook in her book *Textile Bags--The Feeding and Clothing of America*, the flour industry consumed the largest share of the feedsack market with more than 42 percent, sugar was next with 17 percent, behind that were feed, seeds, rice, and fertilizer. Some people refer to these utilitarian bags as simply textile or cloth bags, chicken linen, or 'pretties.' The loosely woven early bag was displaced when machinery became available and, as the trend for cloth packaging became more popular, a tighter cotton bag was more commonly used. When the product inside was used up, the frugal housewife, who wasted no scrap of cloth that came her way, was soon recycling the bags."

Copyright 1995-2003 by The Virtual Quilt Company. All rights reserved. See <http://planetpatchwork.com/feedsack.htm>.

Historians also interviewed Mrs. Lottie Jones, widow of the last operator of the mill, and granddaughters Mrs. Jane Serio, and Mrs. Mary Carroll—all of whom provided their recollections of the mill and recent history of the site (see Chapter 3).

Research “experts” like former Hagley Museum Curator (Industry and Technology) Rob Howard of Anchorage Productions, Heritage Education Specialist Paula Zitzler, Delaware State Museum Curator Chuck Fithian, Ned Heite from Heite Consultants, Paul Layton from Abbott’s Mill, Tony Shahan with Greenbank Mill Associates, and Dr. Herman “Jack” Heikkenen of Dendrachronology Inc. visited the mill site and/or provided useful mill construction and operation details. Their collective knowledge helped archeologists identify and interpret the mill features they discovered, and reconstruct a more complete picture of the early mill, since there were no available drawings or photos of the pre-twentieth century mill or its interior workings.



Photo 2.2 Abbott’s Mill in Sussex County is one of many Delaware mills that were researched and studied to gain insights into Cabbage Pond Mill. Credit: GAI Consultants, Inc.

SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN: ARCHEOLOGICAL APPROACH

Just as one might plan their day or their future, archeologists develop a plan or method for precisely extracting information to answer specific research questions--ones that also address Delaware’s State Archeology Plan. This plan provides an overview of site types and periods by which to evaluate the historic context and significance of identified archeological resources.

A Research Design (or approach) is prepared prior to various phases of archeological fieldwork. It is often based on a consensus reached between DelDOT, DE SHPO, and the archeological team. Based on early results of archeological and historical research, including confirmation that the mill was located within the construction right-of-way, the archeological research design for the Cabbage Mill Site had several objectives:

- 1 to collect information that would help determine the importance of the site; i.e., National Register eligibility;
- 2 to uncover new information about the structure and operation of gristmills on Delaware’s Coastal Plain;
- 3 to evaluate the contribution of the site to a better understanding of Delaware’s Early Industrialization, especially in Sussex County; and
- 4 to better interpret the use, and changes in the use, of water-power systems.

The methods for achieving these objectives included mapping, excavation of systematic shovel test pits, collection units, mechanical and hand excavation, photography, recording site features, and artifact analysis.