

# ABSTRACT

This is a report of Phase I through Phase III survey and data recovery operations at Bloomsbury, a tenant house site occupied between c. 1761 and c. 1814 by a series of families in Duck Creek Hundred, Kent County, Delaware. Some of the occupants were of Native American descent.

After Phase II survey and testing during 1994, the site was determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The site was excavated in 1995 under auspices of the Delaware Department of Transportation by Heite Consulting of Camden, Delaware. A wetland replacement site now occupies the former location of the Bloomsbury tenant house.

Complete excavation, including 100% topsoil sifting over the entire site, yielded evidence for three wells and a single house site, probably one log dwelling that was replaced or rebuilt at least once. The very high level of artifact recovery enabled the authors to examine in detail the consumption patterns of the site occupants. Worked glass artifacts were identified, and a system was devised for distinguishing between intentional and accidental alteration of glass fragments.

Among the techniques employed and evaluated were dendrochronology, soil chemical analysis, tinware replication, floral analysis and faunal analysis. Household economic activities included shoe repair, soap making, and butchering.

# FOREWORD

Agness Sappington, Thomas Conselor, John Francisco, Thomas Cutler, and the Axell family lived in a place called Bloomsbury, on Pumpkin Neck, Duck Creek Hundred, Kent County, Delaware. These were exciting times, when a new nation was raised from the tumult of war. While the kings of France and England hurled armies at one another, farmers on Pumpkin Neck tried to wrest a living from the sticky gray clay soil the local farmers called “white oak” after a tree species well suited to grow on it.

White oak timbers would reinforce the new nation’s warships, but for William Sappington, oak timber was nothing more than a commodity that provided cash to feed Agness and her four daughters from a previous marriage to Jeremiah Loatman.

After it was abandoned, around 1814, the little house at Bloomsbury was forgotten. But 180 years later, an archæological survey party happened upon a few broken dishes and pieces of bricks. As they looked more closely, the archæologists recalled the lives of Agness and her contemporaries.

This is the report of that research, following the discovery process through the various steps prescribed by the cultural resource management system. The report falls into five main parts, which reflect the prescribed course of action under federal and state regulations.

Chapters 1-5 describe the regulatory environment, the reasons for archæological survey and the historical background and setting of Bloomsbury. Chapters 6-9 describe the survey process, through its steps. In chapters 10-14, the site and its features are described. Chapters 15-23 describe the various analytical approaches. In the last two chapters, Bloomsbury in its contexts is summarized. An Afterword proposes lines of future community research that might be followed in developing a Native American context for central Delaware.

Different audiences will be attracted to different parts of this far-ranging report. There are chapters for genealogists, chapters for historians, and some chapters for archæologists, woven into a single interdependent fabric.

The report does not, however, attempt to identify anyone or any modern group as Native Americans. The Native American connection with the site occupants is clear in the documents, but archæology did not provide unequivocal proof that the site was occupied by Native people. In order to address ethnic issues that inevitably will arise, new research methods will be necessary, and new ways of thinking about evidence must be adopted.

Nor does this report pretend to provide a context for Kent County’s Native American post-contact history and archæology. Such a context will be necessary if we are to understand this important aspect of local history; for the present purpose, the authors have assembled an interim background survey provided here in the first five chapters and an appendix.

It is not the purpose of this report to resolve all the issues raised in the first five chapters, but to test the data against the propositions set forth. The Afterword is the author’s attempt to address such questions in a form that future researchers can use.

# MEMORIAM

Ned Heite has made many contributions to archaeology, historic preservation, the history of technology, archival studies, industrial archaeology, genealogy and other fields in his career. His ability to see common threads among apparently disparate data sets was his singular strength.

This report was his last major work before passing over to the Great Archives in 2005 where he is now undoubtedly debating with his typically unrestrained enthusiasm.

In this report, Ned and his team found evidence for a vastly underappreciated segment of society and researched them from their Native American Mitsawocket origins forward. The report showed that the people who lived at Bloomsbury retained a significant connection to their Native American heritage well into the nineteenth century. The research also reflected an intentional obfuscation of ethnic identity in the official records that the researchers were able to document. The information contained herein was documented to the top professional standards of archaeology. The interpretations from that data were based on the same top standards of several professions and woven into a tapestry that showed the people and personalities of the study group beyond the raw data in a rigorously scientific manner that the anthropological leaning of archaeology has striven toward for the last half century.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project owes an immeasurable debt to the late Alonzo Coker, chief and driving force of the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware in Kent County, Delaware. During his too-brief lifetime, “Lonnie” inspired his people to explore their heritage and to recover their birthright as the acknowledged Native American population of Kent County. During this and earlier projects, information needs of the Lenape people have happily coincided with the compliance requirements of the Delaware Department of Transportation. This series of coincidences afforded the authors an opportunity to join the local Lenape in exploring their history, in a collaboration that, one hopes, is mutually beneficial and will survive the immediate project. Liaison with the Lenape community was provided by Lonnie’s mother and brother, Anna and Dennis Coker.

Historical and genealogical research assistance has been generously provided by George Caley, George H. Jones, esq., May Belle Bordley, Lynn Jackson, Jan Jackson, Harry Muncey, John Carter, Michele G. Pierce, Deborah Pierce Unger, Floyd Handsor, Glenn F. Sappington, Lorraine Gregg, and C. Russell McCabe. Ray and Betty Terry, who have been researching the Dean genealogy, shared with the authors their complete files and led the research into exciting new avenues. Since we began sharing research notes on the Internet, our research group has grown considerably, until it now includes thirty or forty regular participants, all of whom have contributed and are due our thanks.

Whenever site data seemed to lead us a dead end, we reached out through the Internet, particularly over the HISTARCH and ARCH-L discussion lists; the resulting flood of ideas was sometimes overwhelming. From the farthest corners of the world came new ideas and bibliographical references. William Hampton Adams, in particular, provided a seemingly endless stream of bibliographies, which the interlibrary loan staff of the Dover Public Library obligingly pursued. In particular, Peggy Prouse, formerly of that institution, did yeoman duty attempting to fulfill our every data need.

For Heite Consulting, fieldworkers were Aaron L. Jones, Kimberly Dugan, George Keeler, Travis Hale, Jeffrey Harbeson, Steven Vicuna, Jason Brown, Gerald Layne, William Sandy, and Lyle Browning. Louise Heite, Catherine Heite, and Cara Blume assisted with analysis and curation.

Artifact illustrations were drawn by student trainees Aaron Jones, Kimberly Dugan, and Catherine Heite. Michael Saunders photographed worked glass fragments. Dr. Chris Coon of Dover Animal Hospital made x-ray plates of the rusted iron artifacts.

Members of the Kent County Archæological Society chapter of the Archeological Society of Delaware who assisted on the site included Frances Remley, Walker Mifflin, Linda Meyers, Marietta Darden, Linda Heazlit, Richard Gardner, Linda Horstick, Rene Herbst, and Marilyn Spong.

From the Department of Transportation, thanks are due to Anne Canby and Nathaniel Hayward, former Secretaries; Raymond Harbeson, Chief Engineer; Eugene Abbott, Director, Planning; Joseph Wutka, Assistant Director, Planning; Terry Fulmer, Manager Environmental Studies; Loretta Brisbane, Secretary; Stephanie Justiano, Project Support; and Kevin Cunningham, Archaeologist. Thanks are also due to Carolann Wicks, Secretary for enabling Heite Consulting to compile the redraft of the report.