

VII

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Site 7S-F-68 cemetery appears to be a small family burial plot that was used during the late eighteenth century, most likely during the period from 1752 to 1799. During the period of the cemetery's use, the attitudes toward death and the treatment of the dead in rural America exhibited a strong continuity with traditions that had their antecedents in medieval Europe. By the end of the sixteenth century, European burial traditions had become fairly well established, but a number of important regional variations appeared as these customs were transferred to the American colonies. American attitudes in general changed profoundly with the Revolution, however, and attitudes toward death changed significantly during the nineteenth century with the rise of urbanization and industrialization.

In colonial New England, public burial plots were typically established in the towns and villages; in the South and Tidewater areas, however, a much more dispersed settlement pattern developed, and the use of small family burial plots scattered about the countryside was common (Stilgoe 1982). In rural Delaware, the use of small family burial plots persisted until the mid-nineteenth century. Bachman and Catts's study of a sample of 21 family burial plots dating from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century demonstrated that these small burial plots were typically located within a broad semicircle to the rear of the farmhouse and away from the principal road upon which the farmstead was sited (Bachman and Catts 1990). Within Bachman and Catts's sample of Kent and Sussex County burial plots, it was found that most family cemeteries were sited between 400 and 1,000 feet from the main house, with a secondary peak between 1,400 and 1,600 feet; the average distance from farmhouse to cemetery plot was circa 675 feet. Within large rural holdings, family burial plots were typically located on high ground, such as a ridge (Bachman and Catts 1990), and the placement of cemeteries on high ground was a widespread custom throughout the Middle Atlantic colonies (Stilgoe 1978, 1982).

Located on a slight ridge of well-drained soil surrounded by an expanse of low-lying topography, the Site 7S-F-68 cemetery appears to conform to the model developed by Bachman and Catts (1990), at least in its physiographic setting. However, the location of the contemporaneous dwelling house is not known. It is believed that the cemetery was used when the property was owned by Andrew Collins Jr. (ca. 1752-1784) and Clement Jackson (1784-1799). The Andrew Collins Jr. dwelling house was probably located on his "Good Luck" tract near his sawmill and gristmill complex on Collins Pond. The Clement Jackson dwelling house was located along the Georgetown to Milford Road (now State Road 213) near Redden Crossroads. It cannot be determined how the Site 7S-F-68 cemetery was located relative to an associated dwelling, because the location of an associated dwelling house has not been identified. There is also a lack of information regarding the location of a contemporary road, as the historical research did not identify any useful cartographic sources. That the principal road in the site vicinity during the late eighteenth century was the old Milford to Georgetown Road, which is now known as County Road 213. The cemetery site is located approximately 200 feet from the present alignment of County Road 213.

Within the rural landscape, family burial plots were typically marked or set off by a fence, wall, drainage ditch, or distinctive plantings. Rural family burial plots were seldom given elaborate landscape treatment, while graveyards in villages and towns were more likely to have received distinctive landscaping, particularly in the form of plantings such as yew, holly, rosemary, willow, or cemetery periwinkle. Small, rural family cemeteries were commonly neglected and often forgotten after a change of property ownership. In small rural family cemeteries, simple wooden

markers or fieldstone, rather than elaborate monuments, were used to mark the location of the graves (Bachman and Catts 1990; Garrow 1989; Pike and Gray 1980; Stilgoe 1978, 1982). No evidence of grave markers of any kind was found at the Site 7S-F-68 cemetery, although it is possible that such markers may have been removed when the area was cultivated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given the scarcity of stone in the region surrounding Site 7S-F-68, it is most likely that burial markers would have been made of wood.

There was no precedent in European traditions, especially those of British Protestants, for family burial grounds, as the western European tradition dictated that the dead be buried in community burial grounds close to churches. The dispersal of the colonial population among scattered farms and plantations may have led to the use of family burial plots, and the presence of family burial plots at George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello estates indicates that the use of family burial plots was a well-established American practice in the late eighteenth century (Sloan 1991).

Attitudes toward death in colonial America were strongly influenced by the beliefs of medieval Europe. The fear of and obsession with death reached a peak in the Middle Ages, stimulated by numerous plagues, epidemics, and the short life spans of this period. The concept of Purgatory developed during the late Middle Ages, as did the *Danse Macabre* and the *Ars Moriendi* traditions, both of which were literal interpretations of the decay and decomposition of the human body that followed physical death. In the late Middle Ages, the human skeleton or a decayed corpse was used to personify death. The *Danse Macabre* or Dance of Death was a procession in which both the living and the dead, represented by animated skeletons, took part. Typically, the living included persons of high social rank, such as popes, bishops, kings, and dukes, and the dialogue between the living and the dead conveyed the notion that all human life and attainment was transitory. The *Ars Moriendi* tradition, which translates as "the art of dying" portrayed death as a time of temptation and assault by demons representing despair, in the face of which the dying man was supposed to maintain faith and belief in the goodness of God (Clark 1950; Stannard 1977).

In the American colonies, the Puritans of New England had the most strongly developed beliefs concerning death and the afterlife, and these beliefs had a wide influence throughout the colonies. Much of the medieval view of death survived in the Puritan ideology, particularly the imagery pertaining to decay and corruption of the physical body that accompanied death. Underlying the Puritan traditions was a view of a sinful people who inhabited the natural world, where death was the punishment for sin. Because of the goodness of God, death was viewed as a calling to eternal life, but it also opened the way to hell, which was the punishment for the unregenerate sinners. The Puritans equated the time of death with a time of judgment of the deceased, and therefore they did not believe in the power of prayers for the deceased. Following the belief that the living could do nothing for the dead other than dispose of the body, Puritan funerals were marked by simplicity. By the end of the seventeenth century, the strict Puritan views began to dissipate, and funerals became more elaborate, with prayers, preaching, consumption of food and drink, and the distribution of token gifts such as rings and gloves (Farrell 1980; Geddes 1981).

American attitudes toward death changed profoundly during the nineteenth century, and the fear of death dissipated with the spread of romanticism, the rural cemetery movement, and the "beautification of death." The spread of romantic ideals in the nineteenth century led to a profound shift in attitudes toward death and the afterlife, permeating virtually all social strata. New attitudes toward death were expressed in the rural cemetery movement, in which elaborate landscape concepts were applied to burial places. During the 1830s, the rural cemetery movement had penetrated the major urban centers of the Northeast, and garden cemeteries were built in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. The new attitudes toward death were also expressed by the use of much more elaborate coffins, which then became known as caskets, among virtually all social strata (Bell 1990; Pike and Gray 1980; Stannard 1977, 1980; Taylor 1980).

In late eighteenth-century Delaware, rural funerals would have been a community event attended by neighbors and friends of the deceased's family. Burial of the corpse would have taken place within two or three days following death, as embalming did not become a widespread practice until the late nineteenth century. Undertaking as a profession began to develop in urban areas during the early nineteenth century. The Philadelphia City Directory first listed an occupational category for "Layers Out of the Dead" in 1810, and the first professional "layers out of the dead" were often widows. Before laying out of the dead became an occupational specialty, preparation of the corpse for burial was often carried out by women who had prior experience in the nursing profession. In rural areas, neighbors and friends would have assumed responsibility for the burial arrangements, including laying out of the corpse and digging the grave, so that the funeral ritual served as a community affair. Little is known concerning the actual funeral rituals themselves, as such events were infrequently commented upon by contemporary observers. Regional patterns had developed during the Colonial period; in the South, particularly in the Virginia Tidewater, funerals were an occasion for drinking and feasting, while the New England practice was much more austere, following Puritan tradition (Habenstein and Lamers 1955; Stilgoe 1982; Taylor 1980).

In the traditional practice of treatment of the dead, i.e., before professional undertakers were commonly available, the corpse was washed, laid out, and wrapped in a shroud. Shrouds were usually made of linen or cerecloth, which was wax-impregnated linen, and they were shaped like a long dress or shirt and bound at the feet. The use of burial cloths or shrouds to wrap the dead dates from biblical times, and there is documentary evidence for the use of shrouds during the medieval period (Crowell et al. 1992; Geddes 1981; Habenstein and Lamers 1955). At the Site 7S-F-68 cemetery, shroud pins were recovered from five of the burials (Features 5, 9, 15, 29, and 30); in one additional burial (Feature 40), shroud pins were not preserved, although the characteristic copper staining was noted on the skull. Only one burial (Feature 5) contained any evidence of other clothing, that being eight copper buttons that may have belonged to a jacket. No other clothing fasteners or clothing fabric was recovered. The absence of clothing, aside from burial shrouds, appears characteristic of the traditional method for treatment of the dead. By the second half of nineteenth century, when American attitudes toward death had changed radically, it became common practice to bury the deceased in their best clothing (Taylor 1980).

The patterning of interments within rural cemeteries typically reflects kin groupings, and thus proximity in the graveyard reflected the social networks of the living. Within the Site 7S-F-68 cemetery, the spatial patterning of burials exhibits two clusters, which may represent kin groups, and four isolated individual interments (see Figure 5). The largest cluster is represented by Features 5, 9, and 15, while the two sub-adults represented by Features 29 and 30 represent a second cluster. The remainder of the burials, represented by Features 36, 38, 39, and 40, appear to be isolated individuals. At the Lafferty Lane Cemetery in Dover, which was in use during Delaware's Early Industrialization period, a number of family groupings were evident among the 120 individual interments (Bachman and Catts 1990).

In the traditional treatment of the dead, alignment of the burials follows the long-established practice of interring the body with the head to the west and the feet to the east, which was established before the Christian era. Symbolically, this orientation prepared the deceased to rise up to meet his (or her) Saviour who, according to Christian tradition, would come from the east (Stilgoe 1978, 1982). The actual orientation of interments at Site 7S-F-68 varied somewhat from a true east-west alignment, as shown in Figure 16. Alignment along a slightly northwest to southeast axis is similar to the pattern observed at the Loockerman's Range Site cemetery, located in Kent County near Dover (Grettlar et al. 1991). At Site 7S-F-68, the burial alignments ranged from 68 degrees west of north to 87 degrees west of north, with 77.5 degrees west of north as an average for the eight interments whose orientation could be measured. The variation in the alignments may reflect burial during different seasons when the sun would have risen at different points on the horizon.

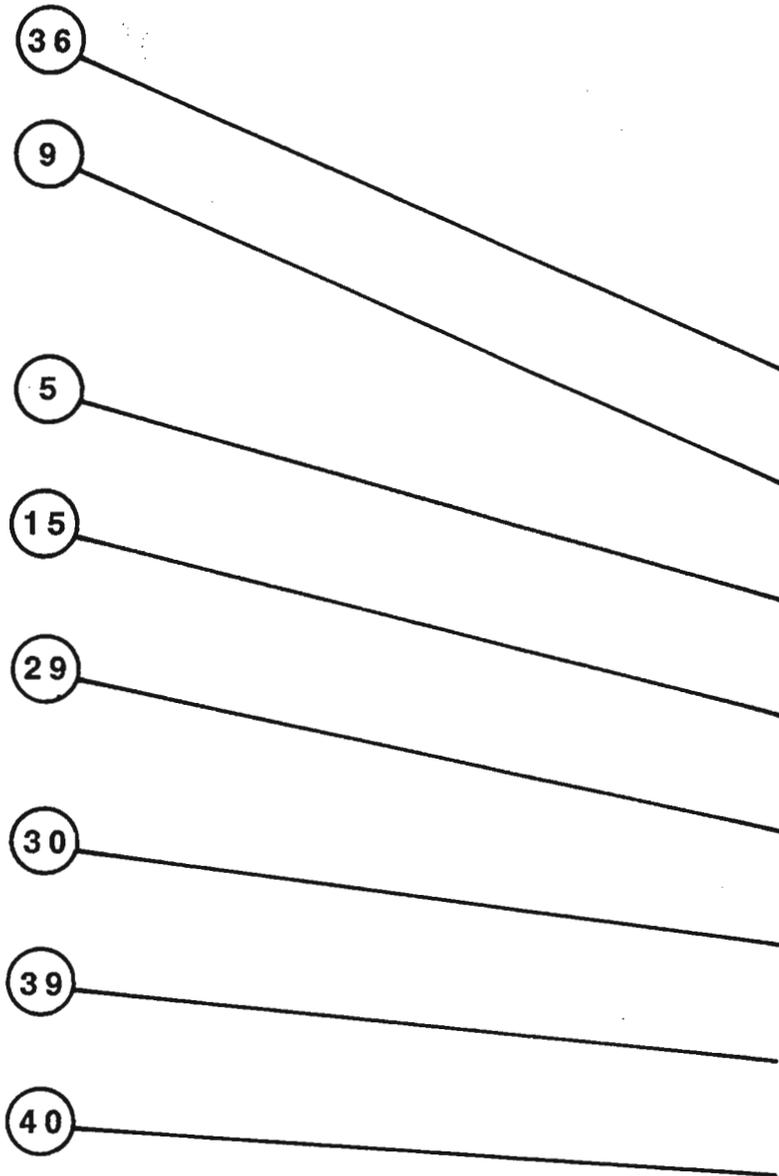
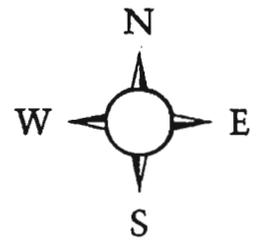


FIGURE 16: Orientation of Burial Features

As an example of the rural family cemetery property type, this site has provided important information regarding Delaware's rural lifeways during the late eighteenth century. Although there are no historical records that provide direct information about this particular cemetery, available information points to a period of use between 1752 and 1799, a period that crosscuts Delaware's Intensified and Durable Occupation (circa 1730-1770) and Early Industrialization (circa 1770-1830) periods (Herman et al. 1989). There has been little archaeological study of small family cemeteries in Delaware, and no historic context has been developed for this property type. The property type is characterized by low archaeological visibility, a feature that is illustrated most clearly by the fact that the cemetery was not identified until commencement of a Phase III prehistoric data recovery program. No evidence of the cemetery was identified during the preceding Phase I and Phase II studies. Bachman and Catts' study of Kent and Sussex County burial plots provides much useful information regarding the geographic distribution and siting of such properties (Bachman and Catts 1990), and the siting characteristics of these sites are fairly well known. However, identification of such sites in the future will be difficult because of their low archaeological visibility and scant historical information.

Although the customs and rituals surrounding death are recognized by anthropologists and historians as crucial to understanding past cultures, historic cemeteries are infrequently investigated by archaeologists, and there are relatively few opportunities for evaluation and treatment of rural family cemeteries as archaeological resources. In the context of cultural resource management studies undertaken in response to development pressures, cemeteries are generally avoided after they are identified. However, cemeteries can provide important information relevant to understanding historical religious beliefs and attitudes toward life and death as well as direct information pertinent to aspects of daily life such as disease, mortality, and diet.

The skeletal analysis that was completed for this study determined that the individuals were of European ancestry, and this information has been essential for the state's effort to locate descendants of the deceased individuals. Beyond that basic information, the skeletal analysis has provided general information regarding the quality of rural life in the late eighteenth century. While none of the recovered skeletal samples provided any indication of the cause of death, there was little evidence of pathology aside from low-level nutritional stress and the normal degenerative changes associated with aging. Extremely severe dental disease stands out as the single pathological condition which was ubiquitous among the adults in the sample population. Every adult individual had some degree of dental decay, abscess, and loss, ranging from a moderate number of carious lesions to extreme dental disease and loss long before the individual died. Dental health in this population was very poor, and there was no evidence of dental work on any of the individuals. In comparison with modern populations, tooth wear was quite heavy, which apparently was the result of a diet consisting of unprocessed or more gritty foods. If the sample from this site may be viewed as representative of the total population, then a pattern of dental decay, abscess, and then loss of many teeth in middle age typified the life cycle of individuals in the population at large.