

ABSTRACT

Between April 18th to April 26, 1996, Hunter Research Inc. conducted a Phase I archaeological survey in conjunction with the Delaware Department of Transportation's proposed improvement of Wiggins Mill Road and replacement of Delaware State Bridge #424 in Townsend, Appoquinimink Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware. The project area consists of a corridor extending for 1,860 linear feet along and immediately adjacent to Road 446, a minor road that is also known locally as Wiggins Mill Road.

A total of 78 shovel tests and two one-meter-square excavation units were excavated. The survey identified two prehistoric activity areas and three historic sites (the site of Wiggin's Gristmill; the Davis/Townsend House Site; and the Wiggins Millpond Bridge/Delaware State Bridge #424) within or immediately adjacent to the project corridor.

Unless the project alignment can be modified slightly to avoid affecting the prehistoric activity area located to the south southeast of Delaware State Bridge 424 along the first terrace, Phase II-level archaeological investigation is recommended to further investigate this resource. No further work is recommended for the other prehistoric activity area located on the knoll located to the northwest of the bridge as use of the proposed construction limits will only result in the removal of approximately one to two feet of intact soils along the alignment in an area where archaeological deposits have already suffered extensive natural erosion. Both locations where prehistoric materials have been found should be excluded from any future consideration as potential staging area sites during construction.

The Wiggins Millpond Bridge (Delaware State Bridge #424) shows slight signs of rust and has been assessed to be in fair condition. The bridge has been also identified as an important historic engineering structure and, although several pony truss bridges still survive within the State of Delaware, few are as intact and unaltered as this example. If replacement of the span cannot be avoided, it is recommended that the bridge be offered to any responsible individual or institution that might be interested in relocating and preserving the structure.

The site of Wiggin's Gristmill appears to be archaeologically intact and retains reasonable integrity. While more detailed archaeological study would be required to fully evaluate this site, it should be considered potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places as a locally significant industrial archaeological resource. The core of the site lies outside the project limits and does not appear to be threatened by the proposed road improvement and bridge replacement actions. It should be noted, however, that location of an early 19th-century saw mill referred to in period documents remains unknown and could conceivably lie closer to the project corridor. As for the prehistoric resources, the gristmill site (and the site of the Davis/Townsend House) should both, if possible, be excluded from consideration as potential staging areas during construction.