11.0 LESSONS LEARNED

The archaeological investigations of Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) provided the opportunity to review traditional methods and interpretations of archaeological sites, as well as experiment and be creative with new ones. A number of lessons were learned in the course of the project.

11.1 Types of Windows, Types of Views

Archaeologists like to believe that excavation sampling in a scientific and statistically valid way yields fairly accurate depictions of pre-contact period activities, as represented through cultural remains at archaeological sites. However, this accuracy is true only when the site deposits are highly homogeneous and evenly distributed, both of which are counterintuitive when exploring small, ephemeral multiple use sites. Especially on archaeological sites with remnants from multiple, unrelated, limited-activity visits, it will be difficult to understand any one visit through sampling. Instead, systematically emplaced, dispersed excavation units are more likely to yield averages of the behaviors which occurred at sites.

Due to its status of never having been plowed, and the commitment to 100 percent excavation of four activity areas, the Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) data recovery indicates that these limited activity areas may measure only 2.0 to 3.0 m (6.6 to 9.8 ft) in diameter. This finding has implications for how we conduct surface survey in plowed fields. If we are attempting to identify and map behavioral scatters that may be small in size, there is no sense in collecting artifacts from larger-sized collection areas. Use of this type of coarse collection strategy guarantees that potentially discreet depositional episodes will be mixed and combined, resulting in averages for interpretive purposes.

The better solution is to piece-plot all surface artifacts. With efficient survey and Global Positioning System (GPS) technologies, this process does not require significantly more time, and will yield a far superior data set. Rather than blindly accept the idea that plowing destroys all pre-contact period artifact patterning, appropriate methodologies can be applied to address the issue of discriminating for small ephemeral use activities in the archaeological record.

11.2 Little Sites, Low Predictability

Given the limitations of the local chronology, the environment was relatively stable during the span of all four visits to Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House). Changes in the general environment (unless seasonal fluctuations) can be dismissed in trying to explain the differences in the four visits. Instead, it appears that the ephemeral nature of the site visits allowed the people using the site a high degree of freedom in choosing when and where to stop.

When the perspective is expanded to a region, it becomes more difficult to predict or model the location and function of the many small ephemeral use sites, including stations, lithic scatters, or extractive locations, found throughout the state. There were so many possible ways for an hour of activity to form an archaeological signature, and many of these site visits had only a vague linkage with the environment.

Despite the temporal association of the Woodland I period to archaeological site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House), the factors that Custer (1986:86-87) describes as Woodland I site/settlement similarities do not describe this site or its use. Such a perspective is counter to the idea that all archaeological sites fit into orderly, logical site typologies and settlement systems.

11.3 The Humbling Site Type

The archaeological site that exhibits one or more extremely short-term, functionally focused visits can be frustrating to interpret. Even when the site has excellent clarity, as in the case of Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House), the functional attributes that are present might indicate a broad range of specific activities. The humbling experience derives from the nature of our analyses, which are at best probabilistic, and the nature of human behavior. When a pre-contact period person invested only a small amount of time in an activity, idiosyncrasy and personal likes and dislikes make the modeling or interpretation of the site visit difficult. Bringing various lines of evidence to bear, we have been able to suggest the possible function of each activity area, while fully acknowledging that alternate functions may also have yielded these same archaeological signatures.

At its best, this site type can be humbling. When such locations have been scattered and combined by plowing, and subjected to biased collection by arrowhead hunters, the level of our professional humility and caution should increase significantly. If a very strong example of the small, ephemeral use site like Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) can yield only

multiple possible interpretations, why should we expect more from weaker examples? In the end, it is acceptable and reasonable to be humbled by a site type, by the idiosyncrasies of individual people, by the limitations of our probabilistic analysis methods, and by the failure of human behavior to match simplistic models. At the end of this lengthy project, the question comes back to the inherent nature of these sites. Regardless of how we manage them, and whether or not every lithic scatter with a projectile point is deemed significant, we do not presently have the methods to confidently move beyond our best guess of why a few people spent a few hours during the pre-contact period at the location which was to become Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House).

11.4 Public Outreach

There were several aspects of public outreach associated with the archaeological investigations of Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House). During the fieldwork portion of the project, staff and residents of the Ronald McDonald House facility located adjacent to the site were invited to observe and/or participate in the excavations. Due to harsh weather conditions, no one from the facility accepted the invitation. While the facility was proximal to the site, the residents may not have been the most receptive audience simply because most are there because they are accompanying critically ill children and would be focusing on family matters much of the time. In addition, most non-archaeologists are not willing to play in the cold mud just as a curiosity.

The consideration of trapping as an important pre-contact period activity, which may produce little or no significant archaeological signature like that represented in the clusters present at Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House), was used intricately during the project public outreach. As part of the Trapping Overview prepared in conjunction with this project, members of the Nanticoke community of Oak Orchard, and the Lenape community of Cheswold, were interviewed about their traditional knowledge of trapping in Delaware. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and included as Appendix H of this document. Based on trapping information gathered during this project, multiple publications and presentations to both the professional and lay communities were completed. These included: *Traditional Trapping In Delaware: A Forgotten Contributor,* a paper presented at the 2005 Middle Atlantic Archaeological Conference (MAAC) meetings (Espenshade 2005d); *Traditional Trapping,* a paper presented at the October 2005 meeting of the Northern Chapter of the Archaeological Society of Delaware (Espenshade 2005c); *Trapping: The Forgotten Provider,* an article written

for the *Bulletin of Primitive Technology* (Espenshade 2005e); and a discussion of the Delaware Trapping Synthesis (Appendix I) in a book review in *Southeastern Archaeology* (Espenshade 2005a).

In addition, the Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) archaeological studies served as the catalyst for the production of *Blood Residue Testing*, a paper presented at the 2005 MAAC meetings (Vish and Yeshion 2005), and *The Inherent Limitations of Short-Term, Limited Activity Lithic Sites: Lessons from the Delaware Piedmont,* a paper presented at the 2005 meetings of the Eastern States Archaeological Federation (Espenshade 2005b). A document entitled *Small Site, Interesting Story* was produced with the hope that it would serve as an accessible and easily understandable description of the site and some basic archaeology for the general public (Appendix J). A brochure entitled *One Hundred Little Things* was also produced as a means to explain the importance of small, short-term, ephemeral archaeological sites by suggesting numerous activities that could result in an archaeological record similar to that identified at each of the four Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) artifact clusters (Appendix K). Both documents in Appendixes J and K can stand alone as a handout/brochure, or web presentation in the future.

Finally, a synthesis of use-wear studies in Delaware and a general overview of the approach to use-wear analyses, along with suggestions for future analysis methodology are presented in Appendix L of this report.

11.5 Future Research

The study of Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) demonstrates that we can no longer used generalized interpretations about sites as a whole based on low artifact frequencies and a lack of cultural features. We can discriminate between individual behaviors when the appropriate preservation and excavation conditions exist and proper analyses are applied. Generalized site types, such as “lithic scatters,” “resource extraction stations,” “kill sites,” “limited lithic reduction sites,” or “trail-side stops,” no longer satisfy the detailed interpretation necessary to appropriately describe and reconstruct pre-contact period lifeways in Delaware. Instead, future research must view the archaeological remains resulting from limited activity visits as a means to address specific site-visit functions and individual behaviors. In a situation such as that present at Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House), rather than fall back on generalized site characterization, it is possible to bring analytical techniques to bear on specific questions about what people were doing at the site when they visited the location. Future

research must carefully integrate and assess multiple lines of evidence in order to offer probabilistic statements about what was happening during those few hours at sites like 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House).

The strength of the present study rests in the clarity of the site deposits. Having the ability to recognize and individually study four activity areas within the site, we were able to address differences in those visits and show how the land form was variably used during the Woodland I period. However, had the site been plowed for 100 years, such plowing would have rendered the site similar to the vast majority of known sites in Delaware. Instead of evidencing four dissimilar visits, the plowed site would yield an averaged appearance of high tool diversity and relatively large site size. Lacking the ability to recognize a site as a palimpsest of individual activity areas is something that future research must address. Future archaeological research can not continue to interpret sites within generalized site typologies, which falsely strengthen some site types and misinterpret real site functions. Categorization of sites based on previously formulated context typologies contributes to the continued confusion of attribute-based versus behavior-based typologies. Continued revision of Delaware contexts must be supported in future archaeological research, if we do not want to continue propagating generalized, averaged descriptions of Delaware's pre-contact period past.

The archaeological data recovery of Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) illustrates that archaeologists must think "outside of the box" of traditional behaviors and activities being performed during the pre-contact period. For example, many past activities, such as trapping or gathering cattails, may not have left an artifactual footprint in the archaeological record. Perishable materials used for many activities are not often preserved, and so traditionally these behaviors were ignored or only given lip service in our archaeological interpretations. Future research must find a way to interpret probabilistic statements about behaviors which may or may not be directly evidenced in the archaeological record. Sites like 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) and replicative and/or blind studies may hold the key to advancing these types of interpretations. In addition, too few archaeologists have practical experience with primitive technology. The pre-contact period groups we study were well attuned to nature, so it is important for us to have a strong familiarity with the local natural environment as well as the full range of traditional technology. The failure to consider the full range of adaptive technology leaves us describing pre-contact period life in Delaware without economically important behaviors such as trapping. Future research must consider the importance of practical training for archaeological students, as well as the involvement of local Native Americans in the discussions of traditional technologies.

A rarely addressed topic, but one germane not only to the Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House) data recovery but most publicly funded archaeological projects, is that of cost-benefit. Every archaeologist working in cultural resource management has a sense of what basic research and analyses will be necessary in order to answer questions regarding site eligibility; however, when analyses move beyond the basics, cost-benefit considerations come into play. Despite the rare opportunity to excavate and study the non-plowed Site 7NC-B-54 (Ronald McDonald House), cost limitations were a consideration during the overall research design.