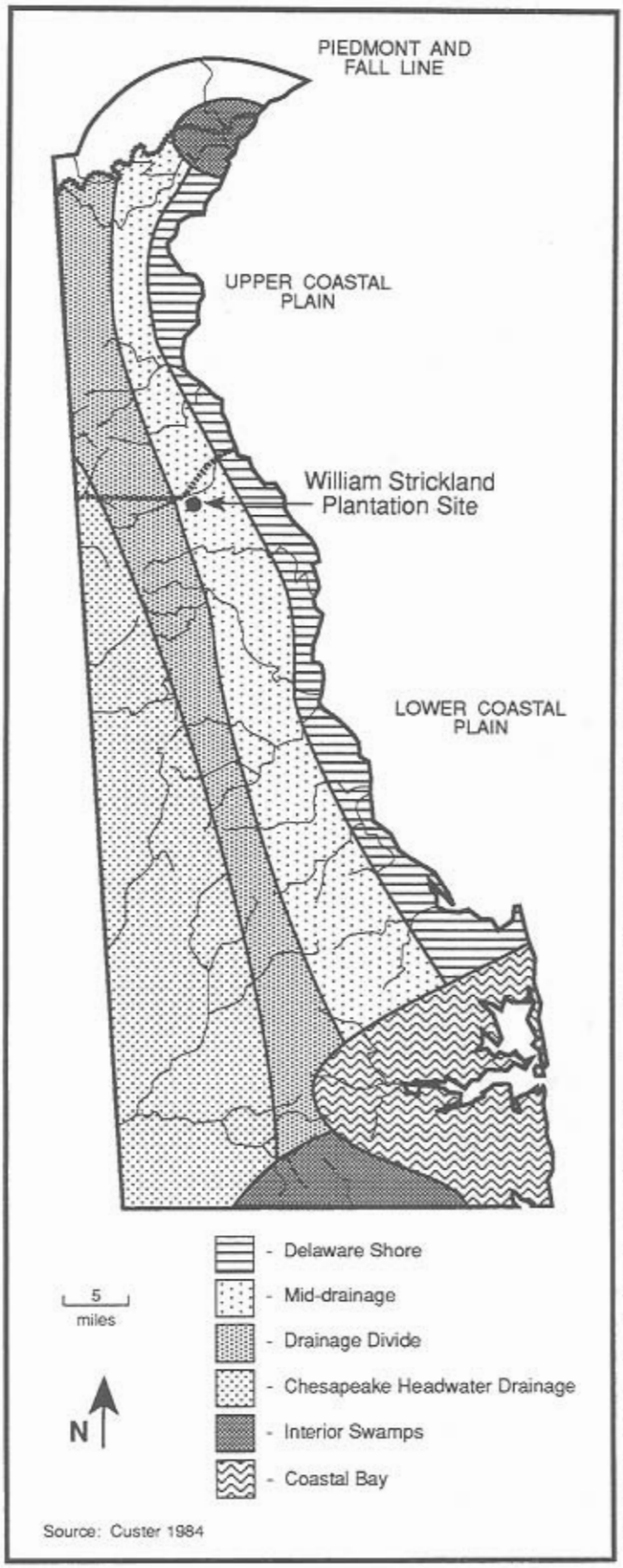
INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of Phase III archaeological data recovery excavations at the William Strickland Plantation Site, (7K-A-117), Smyrna in Duck Creek Hundred, Kent County, Delaware (Figure 1, Plate 1). The data recovery investigations at the site focused on an historic occupation ranging from the late seventeenth to late eighteenth centuries, with the most intensive occupation dating from circa 1730 to 1760. Fieldwork, artifact analyses, and report preparation were carried out between June 1990 and March 1994 by archaeologists from the University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research (UDCAR). Funding for the project was provided by the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration to fulfill regulatory obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (amended).

FIGURE 2

Physiographic Zones of Delaware



Source: Custer 1984

The William Strickland Plantation Site was initially identified by archival research during a Phase I location/identification survey of the proposed State Route 1 Corridor (Grettler et al. 1991:59-87). This work was done in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act to evaluate the effects of the proposed construction of State Route 1 on significant, or potentially significant, cultural resources as defined by the National Register of Historic Places (36 CFR. 60. sec. 1202). Phase I and II field investigations conducted at the William Strickland Plantation Site discovered diagnostic eighteenth century artifacts in intact archaeological features with associated cultural materials in the surrounding plow zone soils. Features identified during the Phase I investigation included trash middens and post holes. Features identified during the Phase II investigations included more trash middens, storage pits, and fencelines (Grettler et al. 1991:69-80). Additional archival research for the Phase I/II investigations found a 1770 road plat that showed the location of the site (Grettler et al. 1991:62-69). It is important to note that the 1770 road plat refers to the site as "Peter Mannee's house on sd. Cahoon's land." This reference led the researchers to call the site the "Manee-Cahoon" Site during the initial phases of the research. However, subsequent archival research, described later in this report, discovered that William Strickland was the inhabitant of the site who was most likely associated with the archaeological remains, and the site was renamed to reflect this fact.

Based on the results of the Phase I and II investigations of the site, it was considered to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion "D" because the site would likely yield significant archaeological data on rural domestic life in the eighteenth century in central Delaware. The eighteenth century archaeological record of Delaware is very sparse, and the William Strickland Site's preserved features contained artifacts and ecofacts whose study would add appreciably to our understanding of Delaware's colonial heritage. The archaeological remains also provided data that could not be obtained from documents of this period.

Environmental Setting

The William Strickland Plantation Site is located in the Lower Coastal Plain physiographic province (Figure 2) of Delaware, south of Mill Creek, a tributary of the Smyrna River, which is also known as the main branch of Duck Creek (Figure 3). The Lower Coastal Plain is underlain by the sand deposits of the Columbia Formation (Jordan 1964:40). Reworking of these sediments has produced a relatively flat and featureless landscape. Elevation differences average 30 feet (10 meters) and these small elevation changes are further moderated by long gradual slopes. Nevertheless, this topographical variation is sufficient to cause differential distributions of plant and animal species (Braun 1967:246-247). Nearby water courses, such as Mill Creek and Duck Creek, are tidal and brackish in their middle and lower reaches, and extensive salt marshes are found along most of the drainages and in coastal areas. The soils at the site are comprised of Sassafras sandy loam, which is formed in well drained upland settings, and are distributed in a mosaic pattern across the region. These Sassafras sandy loams are highly productive and have been extensively farmed. The soils are easy to work, warm up early in the spring, and are some of the most productive in Kent County (Matthews & Ireland 1971:21-22).

PLATE 2

Belmont Hall

Since the arrival of Europeans and the colonization of the region, land use in the site area has been primarily agricultural. Over the years the population of the Smyrna area has been involved in agriculture and its supporting occupations, such as milling, shipping, and blacksmithing. A brief economic boom in Smyrna in the mid-nineteenth century initiated a trend towards commercial and urban development that continues until today. This mid-century boom was the result of improvements in transportation and commercial truck farming. Since the early 1960s, the vicinity of the William Strickland Plantation Site south of Smyrna has been drastically altered at an increasingly rapid rate through commercial and residential development. Along Route 13, strip commercial development coupled with residential development occurred, and produced the current mix of suburban and rural land use.

Previous Archaeological Investigations

The William Strickland Plantation Site was initially identified by archival research. An 1823 Orphan's Court plat of the land of Thomas Collins, showed a 99 x 214.5-foot rectangular area (6 by 13 perches) along the east property line set off from the remainder of the property (Figure 4). Collins was the owner of nearby Belmont Hall, an imposing nineteenth century brick structure (Plate 2), and this small area noted on the plat was originally thought to be a family cemetery. The 1823 land plat in Figure 4 is also interesting because it provides a look at the local environmental diversity included in a

PLATE 3

Mapping Historic Property Lines with a Transit

single individual's land holding. Collins' land extends from a frontage on Mill Creek more than three-quarters of a mile to an interior poorly drained woodlot. The Mill Creek frontage includes a band of woods along the creek a section of marsh, labeled as "cripple," and a sand bar, labeled "sands." Up until the early twentieth century, the Delaware River's small coastal tributaries, like Mill Creek, were navigable. However, siltation from erosion eventually filled the drainages and they assumed their modern narrow and shallow forms. The sand notation on this 1832 map shows that erosion and siltation may have already been a problem in the early nineteenth century.

The 1823 property line on the Orphan's Court plat was reconstructed on the modern landscape by careful mapping, with the location of Belmont Hall as a reference point (Plate 3) and a backhoe was used to excavate six trenches across the area of the plat (Figure 5). The trenches were dug along north-south axes to intersect any potential historic graves, which are typically oriented in an east-west direction. The testing did not find any graves or other evidence of a historic cemetery. Instead, it located two historic trash middens and four post holes (Figure 5). The middens contained black, "greasy," organic-rich soil, and the artifacts recovered from the middens included redware, pipe stem fragments, and

animal teeth. Other historic artifacts recovered from the plow zone and the surface of the middens included oyster shell, ceramics (scratch blue stoneware, Whieldon ware, English salt-glazed stoneware, Staffordshire earthenwares), and olive bottle glass, wrought nails, and clear window glass.

Phase II investigations of the site consisted of the excavation of 352 shovel test pits (STPs) at 10-foot intervals and 63 3 x 3-foot test units along the grid established during the Phase I Survey (Figure 6). The Phase II testing identified two different areas of the site on the basis of artifact concentrations and these areas are also shown in Figure 6. Historic features were identified in both areas, but were significantly more numerous in Area I, which is the core area of the site. Specifically, Area I was defined by high concentrations of features and artifacts.

Area II had lower artifact and feature densities. STPs were excavated in all directions away from the centers of Areas I and II until artifact densities dropped to less than two artifacts per STPs in order to define the outer limits of the site.

A total of 16 undisturbed historic features were identified by shovel test pits, and based on these locations and artifact densities, 3 x 3-foot test units were excavated to locate additional intact features. Artifacts recovered from the undisturbed features included salt-glazed stoneware, brick, olive bottle glass, clear glass and an abundance of animal bone. No intact features were located in most

of the 63 test units excavated, and 61 additional features were identified. These features included trash middens, storage pits and post hole and molds. No intact house foundation was identified although a concentration of brick fragments was noted.

Table 1 provides a summary catalog of the historic artifacts from the Phase I and II studies. Artifacts such as ceramics, faunal remains, bottle glass, and pipe fragments comprised 90% of the total artifact assemblage. Architecturally related artifacts such as window glass fragments, brick, plaster, and nail fragments comprised the remaining 10% of the assemblage. The dates associated with the artifacts agreed with the archival and documentary data suggesting that the site was occupied during the second quarter of the eighteenth century.