

Phase I and Phase II Archaeological Findings - Summary

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In the winter of 2021, archaeologists conducted a survey of the area that would be affected by the replacement of the bridge on Hessong Bridge Road over Little Hunting Creek in Frederick County, Maryland. A small family cemetery was known to be located on the southwest portion of the project area, but its full extent was uncertain. In addition, a historic stone-lined well had been previously filled in by the property owner within the project area. The archaeological investigation, which employed a ground-penetrating radar survey, additionally identified a total of 42 probable graves and 36 possible graves in two clusters; the remains of two buildings; a path connecting the buildings to the cemetery; and a concentration of slag related to a blacksmith shop.

The larger of the two buildings was associated with an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chapel and school which was used by local German Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Research indicated that the property – called “Partnership” – was patented in 1767, and conveyed in 1774 to trustees of the two congregations for the purpose of divine worship and education. The blacksmithing materials were associated with a later nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century blacksmith shop which was located on the property. Together, these components were designated an archaeological site – that is, a location where material evidence of past activity is preserved. While the major components of the site – the chapel and cemetery – were located outside the project area, a portion of the site would be affected by the bridge replacement. Because impacts to the site could not be avoided, a more intensive archaeological investigation was undertaken to explore the significance and integrity of the site in March 2023.

The investigators first undertook intensive research efforts to identify records that might be associated with the church, school, or cemetery. Research revealed that the church was associated with a congregation located in what was called “the Turkey.” Marriage records and land records helped identify some of the individuals associated with this congregation. While only six full names are legible on the surviving headstones, other individuals who might have been buried here are known from oral histories and the detailed diaries of Moravian missionaries who were active in the area.

Some of the individuals who are associated with the chapel at Partnership were also instrumental in establishing other churches in the vicinity, and several of them also served in the German Regiments in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Interestingly, those associated with the Turkey congregations also appear in the baptismal records of Apple’s Church, established in Mechanicstown (Thurmont), between 1775 to 1802, as well as in the baptismal records of the Union church in Creagerstown between 1788 and 1791. The elected elders for the church in Creagerstown were both previously associated with the church at Partnership.

A small number of eighteenth-century artifacts recovered from the site has verified eighteenth-century occupation on the property, yet records indicate that the congregation was very active at other churches in the vicinity. Partnership may have once been envisioned as an important center for a community of German immigrants, but was eclipsed by the growing centers of Creagerstown, Catoctin Furnace, and Mechanicstown in the early nineteenth century. By that time, many of the original trustees and congregation members had started to die off. The remaining congregation members may have moved on to other churches in Creagerstown and Mechanicstown while the cemetery continued to be utilized as a non-denominational burial ground.

As early as the 1820s, the chapel may have functioned exclusively as a school known as “Public School 31.” The school was ideally situated at the crossroads to serve children on the outskirts of Creagerstown, Lewistown, and Catoctin Furnace. Several trustees of the school were residents or employees of nearby Catoctin Furnace, which explains why District 31 was called “Furnace.” Efforts were made to obtain funding to build an educational facility nearer to the village, which finally succeeded in 1868. A new school at Catoctin Furnace was built and Public School 31 was closed that year. Archaeological testing to the north of the chapel and school – which would be affected by the bridge replacement – did not result in the identification of any other important features or artifacts.

Many years later, horses and mules from nearby farms would be brought to a blacksmith shop located on the same property for new horseshoes. Blacksmithing produces distinctive forms of waste. When iron is heated and forged, some oxidized surface film is detached as small flakes known as hammerscale. A blacksmithing forge also generated large and small lumps of slag or clinker as a waste byproduct. Useless metal waste which could not be recycled was also discarded. Such waste would be deposited in a specific refuse area set back from the blacksmith shop.

Archaeological testing identified such a blacksmith refuse area; the shop itself appears to have been located further to the west where an earlier ford crossed the stream. The artifacts generated within the project area were primarily slag, small non-usable scrap metal, and broken ceramic and glass tableware. The presence of twentieth-century artifacts in the assemblage confirms that the blacksmith was operating in the early years of the twentieth century, a critical period of transformation for the trade of blacksmiths. Many blacksmiths had to rapidly adopt new technologies and materials, as well as specialize in additional trades in order to continue operating.

The archaeological work conducted for the bridge replacement has identified a site with exceptional potential to provide a historical portrait of how early German immigrants in western Maryland organized a rural community based on religion, worshipped, treated their dead, and educated their children; and also how one local blacksmith adapted to rapidly changing world. The important elements of the site, including the remains of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century structures, the cemetery, and the remains of a blacksmith shop, will not be impacted by the replacement of Hessong Bridge.

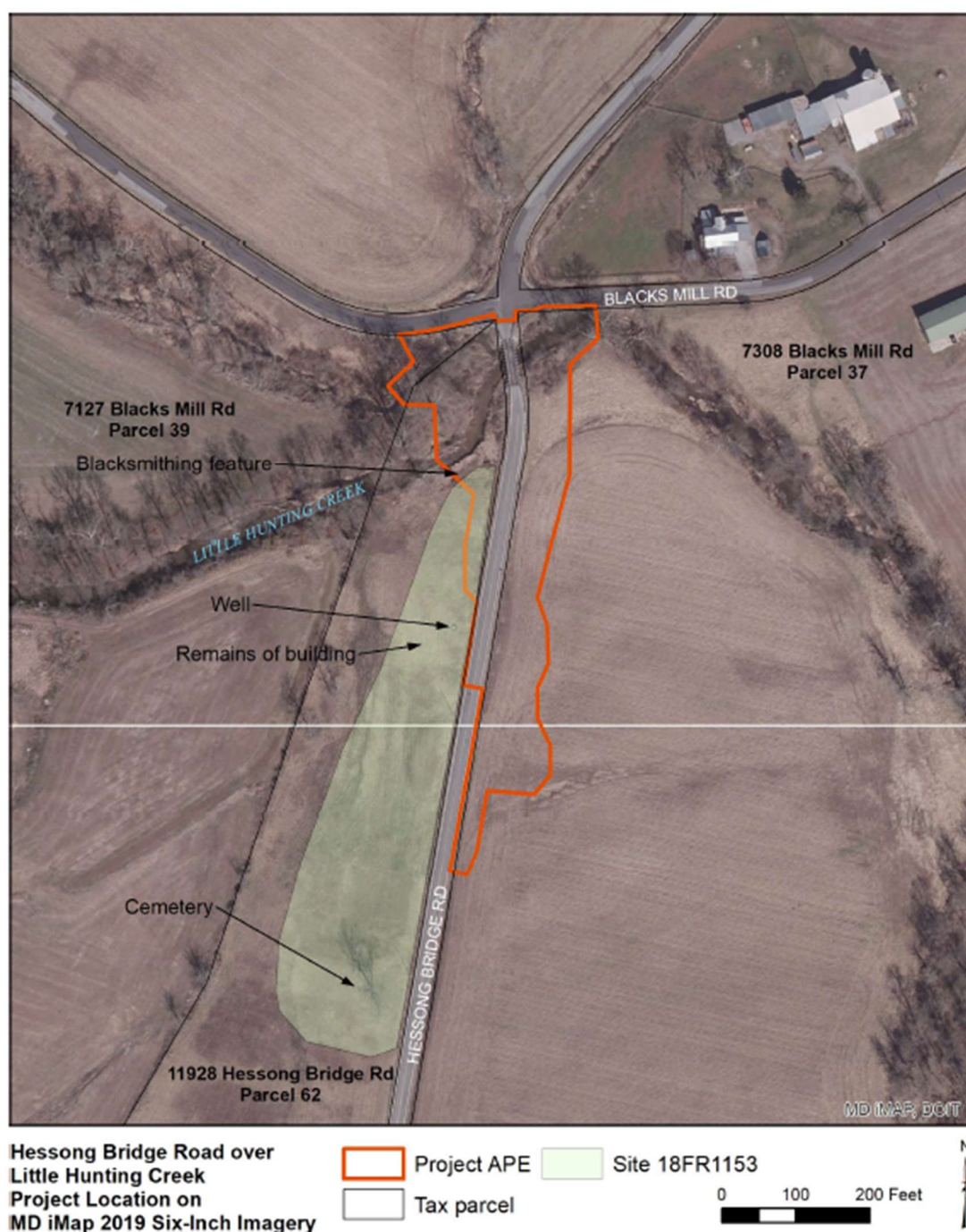


Figure 2: Project APE on aerial photograph