

Proposed Major Subdivision Next to 1761 Brearley House, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey

Review of Stage I (Archaeological) Survey, Block 5101, Lot 18, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey by R. Alan Mounier, Newfield, NJ 08344, (November 7, 2018)

By:

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Summary:

1. These comments apply chiefly to the impact of the proposed subdivision on below-ground archaeological resources, and not in detail to other impacts to the historic character and setting of the Brearley House, which are being addressed by others. The current site plan for the subdivision is, at a minimum, an adverse encroachment onto the archaeology of Brearley House Site.
2. The Stage I Survey reviewed here demonstrates that archaeological resources related to the Brearley House and to archaeological site 28-Me-297 will be destroyed.
3. The Brearley House is an exceptional archaeological, historical and architectural resource which therefore requires exceptional preservation measures.
4. For archaeological resources, a modification is proposed to the site plan which would expand the Open Space area west of the Brearley House. This expansion will protect archaeological resources, including the historic barn site. It requires, at a minimum, the elimination of proposed Building 14. Areas of site 28-Me-297 not included in the expanded Open Space area would be subject to archaeological documentation in advance of construction.

The Survey

This survey has been produced for the applicant, JAS Homes of Burlington New Jersey, as part of compliance with Lawrence Township Planning and Zoning Ordinances. Its purpose is to provide background information on the history and archaeology of the property, to test for the occurrence of archaeological remains, and to provide a preliminary evaluation of their significance. The significance criteria are those developed for the National Register of Historic Places. These are widely used as the standard by which the importance of archaeological resources is determined.

The project manager and author of the report, R. Alan Mounier, has many years of experience in similar surveys throughout New Jersey. His expertise in Native American prehistoric archaeology, in particular, is widely recognized by professional colleagues and by reviewing agencies concerned with historic preservation.

The report, and the survey which it documents, are both adequate to characterize the archaeological resources of the area of the proposed major subdivision at this level of investigation.

The main conclusions of the report are:

1. A newly identified Prehistoric Site, designated 28-Me-394, at the northwestern corner of the application site, does not merit further investigation or protection.
2. The area immediately west of the Brearley House, which forms part of previously identified Prehistoric and Historic Site 28-Me-297 and which also corresponds to the historic barnyard area of the Brearley House, requires additional work at the Stage II level to establish its significance.

Commentary and Recommendations

I have concerns about the implications of these recommendations for the future integrity of the Brearley House Site. I accept the conclusions concerning 28-Me-394, but recommend a different approach to the portion of 28-Me-297 that, as the Mounier report confirms, falls within the application site. 28-Me-297 is an integral part of the Brearley House, which has been listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places since 1979.

This was clearly the historic barnyard area for the Brearley House, and moreover is now known to contain both prehistoric and historic artifacts and features. I therefore conclude that **the site plan currently under consideration (as of April 9 2019) comprises an irreversible encroachment onto the National and State Register of Historic Places property of the Brearley House. It will adversely affect both the historic space and setting of the farmstead, and inevitably destroy the associated archaeological resources.**

It should be noted at this point **how exceptional the Brearley House Site is.** In addition to its importance as one of the most northerly examples of vernacular patterned-brick Georgian “Quaker” architecture in New Jersey, the site has, exceptionally, yielded well-preserved archaeological evidence for two earlier houses on the site, the earliest probably dating to about 1700. This is a graphic example of the manner in which Colonial settlers, with the assistance of enslaved people, were able to steadily improve their material circumstances over three generations in the 1700’s. This archaeological evidence has been well characterized and fully reported, but is in no way exhausted at this point. One particular gap in the archaeological record is evidence of the enslaved individuals who are known to have lived on the site.

The reason that we know all this is because of years of research undertaken under the auspices of Lawrence Township since 1999. The Township also sponsored the production of the report on this work, using funds provided by U.S. Department of the Interior - National Park Service (NPS) through the State of New Jersey:

Ian Burrow and Joshua Butchko

2016 *Three Houses and Three Thousand Years: Archaeological Research at the Brearley House [28me297], Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey, 1998-2005.*

The report is on file with:

- The Township of Lawrence
- Historic Preservation Office, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- The New Jersey Historic Trust
- Lawrence Historical Society
- Lawrence Township Board of Education
- Mercer County Library

In view of Lawrence Township's stated "cornerstone commitments to conservation, cultural diversity and historic preservation" (the second sentence on the Township's Website), and the exceptional importance of the Brearley House, in particular as an archaeological site, I submit that the current site plan must be modified.

It is therefore recommended that the limited **area of Open Space identified on the site plan (5101.01) be considerably expanded** to include more of the area identified as part of 28-Me-297 on "Figure 3: Schematic Map of Testing, Northern End of Project Area" in *Stage I Survey, Block 5101, Lot 18, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey* by R. Alan Mounier, Newfield, NJ 08344, (November 7 2018).

Specifically, it is recommended that the structure identified as "**Building 14**", of eight units, should **be deleted from the site plan to increase the size of the proposed Open Space back to at least the proposed alignment of Pratt Lane**. This will protect the known location of the historic barn and more of the archaeological site while retaining some sense of the historic setting of farmstead. This could be enhanced by screen plantings along the final alignments of Pratt Lane and Buildings 13 & 15 subject to additional needed archaeological work discussed below. Results of this work may require them to be redesigned and possibly moved further to the south.

This proposed expansion of the Open Space may not include all of the area identified on "Figure 3: Schematic Map of Testing, Northern End of Project Area" in *Stage I Survey, Block 5101, Lot 18, Lawrence Township, Mercer County, New Jersey* by R. Alan Mounier, Newfield, NJ 08344, (November 7 2018). These remaining areas should be subjected to a combined Stage II and Stage III archaeological evaluation and data recovery program. This is predicated on the assumption that adverse effects to the archaeology in these remaining areas can be acceptably addressed through documentation to accepted professional standards.

Ian Burrow
April 17, 2019