

Designing the 2002 Poster

The 2002 Delaware Archaeology Month poster highlights some of the historic archaeological sites investigated along the City of Wilmington's Christiana River waterfront. These sites were investigated in conjunction with an ongoing effort to revitalize areas of the City that once contained a large portion of the industrial and commercial activity that provided the City's "Life's Blood." Owing to changing economic conditions and demographics, the waterfront fell on hard times, and the shops and industrial yards that crowded it disappeared.

The backdrop consists of a portion of "A Birdseye View of the City of Wilmington," provided courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware. This depiction shows the City of Wilmington as it existed at the time of the Civil War, in the 1860s. Although conjectured and presented from an artist's perspective, it is based in large measure on contemporary sources, including maps, prints, and photographic images. It is considered a reasonably accurate representation of what the area would have looked like on any given day at the time of the Civil War. The "Birdseye View" effectively conveys the vitality of the city, and underlines the important role the Christiana River played in its historic development and evolution. The river, in addition to serving as one of the city's main arteries of transportation and commerce, was a focal point of much of the city's industrial activity, being the primary area where many of the largest industrial concerns, as well as many of the smaller specialized craft and artist enterprises, were located. Large concerns, such as **the Harlan & Hollingsworth shipyard**, were among the principal sources of employment for the city's residents, while the smaller enterprises provided goods and services for local consumption and specialized support functions for the larger concerns. It can truly be said that the Christiana waterfront provided the underpinnings for the economic infrastructure of the City of Wilmington.

The photographic images and line drawings superimposed on the "Birdseye View" represent some of the archaeological remains exposed during excavations along the waterfront. The images are from four of the dozen or so sites that were excavated and represent a cross section of the sites documented for the area. Sites not depicted include a lumberyard, a grocery, and a wheelwright's shop, as well as a number of residences and a variety of industrial areas relating to such things as production of leather. The sites depicted span almost the whole period of development along the waterfront. They are keyed to their actual locations on the "Birdseye View."

The earliest site depicted on the poster is an **18th century boat slip** located at the foot of Market Street. This may have been used as a ferry across the Christiana until the early part of the 19th century, when it was replaced by a permanent bridge. Two of the sites relate to one of Wilmington's most important industries, shipbuilding. Wilmington's shipbuilding industry was pre-eminent in terms of production capacity and innovation, which led to the naming of the area along the river as "America's Clyde." The first of

these sites is **the Harris Shipyard**, which was established in the 18th century and remained in business until the Civil War. The Harris Shipyard was involved in the construction and repair of wooden sailing vessels.

The second site is **the Harlan & Hollingsworth Shipyard** established in the mid-19th century. It stayed in business under a variety of names until after World War II. This shipyard engaged in the production of steam-powered iron-hulled ships and was one of the innovators in the field. It was one of the leading manufacturers of corvette escorts, and specialized landing craft so essential to the conduct of the amphibious military operations that were the hallmark of America's World War II campaigns in the Pacific, as well as an important element of operations in the North African and European theaters of war.

The last site depicted is a **blacksmith shop** that was in operation for most of the 19th century. The remains depicted at this site indicate that the activities undertaken ranged from the mundane, such as the replacement of horseshoes, to the more esoteric, such as the production of components possibly contracted out by the nearby wheelwright and carriage works, as well as castings for the adjacent shipyards.

All of the archaeological sites explored in the course of the excavations along the waterfront help to flesh out the details of that grand pageant we call history. They are a reminder that history is not static, and that it need not be confined to the realm of the written word as put down in books and documents, or even to the visible remnants of that past as represented by surviving structures and in more or less intact landscapes. The archaeological footprints of these sites offer a valuable supplement to historic source materials, and they provide a tangible link with the past. They are proof positive that history is not just in our mind's eye, but that it is literally underfoot, awaiting discovery and helping us to understand who we were and who we are, both in terms of ourselves as individuals and in terms of ourselves as members of a society or a culture.

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MAAR Associates, Inc.

Delaware Archaeology Month is sponsored by a committee of the Archaeological Society of Delaware, partnered with professional and avocational archaeologists living and/or working in Delaware, and concerned about preserving Delaware's rich heritage of archaeological sites. Contact Craig Lukezic or Alice Guerrant at 302-736-7400, for further information.

The committee includes members from the Archaeological Society of Delaware, City of Wilmington Department of Planning, Delaware Department of Transportation, Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, Delaware State Parks, Delaware State Historic Preservation Office, Delaware State Museums, GAI Consultants, Inc., Gannett Fleming, Inc., Greenbank Mill Associates, Inc., Hunter Research, Inc., Iron Hill Museum

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