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An African American Site Investigation in Rural Delaware

John Bedell, Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.

This last June Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. carried out Phase II test excavations at the house of Arthur John Henry, a African-American farmer. Henry's house, built c. 1878 at Pine Tree Corners in southern New castle County, was originally considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a typical example of a dwelling type known as a "House and Garden," common among tenants and poor free African Americans in Delaware.

Documentary research indicated, however, that despite being unable to sign his name, Henry was the owner of 50 acres of farmland on which he grew fruit and vegetables. When he died in 1929 his real estate was valued at \$1,200.00 and he left \$230.00 in cash and \$80.00 of tomatoes. In addition, he was a leading member of his church, Lees Chapel AME, and one of the founders of the community of Pine Tree Corners.

Henry's success shows the danger of considering any person's life and home "typical." Unfortunately, archaeological testing indicated that the house had been moved in the 1930s, after Henry's death, and no artifacts or features associated with him were identified.

A report on the project is forthcoming in the Delaware Department of Transportation's archaeology series, detailing the investigation of the Henry house and presenting a historic context statement for "House and Garden" sites. The department can be contacted at P. O. Box 778, Dover, DE 19903, (800) 562-5600.