

106 SUCCESS STORY

Highways to History Demonstrates the Value of Public Archaeology

Connecticut



“The general public does not often hear about the positive outcomes of highway building, but here is a prime example of the importance of cultural resource management and its contributions toward understanding our historic past. While the archaeology is conducted with the utmost scientific professionalism, this book combines the excitement of discovery with unique insights into colonial life that only archaeology can achieve. Everyone involved with this publication should take a bow, for it puts Connecticut at the forefront of highway archaeology.”

—NICHOLAS BELLANTONI, PH.D.
Former State Archaeologist

Photos: Above, creamer mended from several separate pieces from the Sprague site in Andover; Right, archaeologists excavating the Sprague House site; final stages of excavation of the south cellar or “New House” at the Goodsell site in North Branford



THE STORY

The first Europeans arrived in Connecticut when Dutch fur traders sailed up the Connecticut River in 1614 and built a fort near present-day Hartford. After Puritans from the Massachusetts Bay Colony settled in the Hartford area in 1633, several colonies were established including Hartford, Colony of Connecticut, Old Saybrooke, Windsor, and New Haven. What remains of Connecticut’s colonial legacy today are largely houses that reflect the upper class of Euro-American society, but less is known about the everyday lives of the colonial middle class. The four sites discovered by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) projects were determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion D; sites that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

THE PROJECT

In 2013, CTDOT proposed four projects that required widening and realignment of existing roadways in order to improve safety and accommodate increased traffic. While no standing historic structures were impacted, construction outside the existing road right-of-way called for archaeological surveys prior to construction.

THE 106 PROCESS

The projects were funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requiring compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In the Section 106 process, federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur. Archaeological surveys for the projects revealed the existence of four significant sites that would be impacted. The archaeological excavations revealed the remains of four 18th century houses, providing previously unknown resources that expanded knowledge about life in colonial Connecticut.



Photos: Above, excavated cellar of Sprague House in Andover; Right, archaeologists at Daniels House site in Waterford; sewing items from Daniels House, including scissors, needle, glass beads, straight pins, thimbles; teaspoon and ceramics from Benedict House in Wilton (all photos courtesy CTDOT)

The Sprague, Goodsell, Daniels, and Benedict sites show what life and work would have been like for the “middling sort” hundreds of years ago. The houses reflect modest living conditions, and the artifacts they left behind are evidence of their Yankee thriftiness. CTDOT realized that collectively the sites presented a thematic resource of 18th century lifeways and vernacular architecture and committed to share the findings with the public as part of the mitigation. The FHWA, Connecticut State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and CTDOT entered into four individual Memoranda of Agreement that prescribed archaeological data recovery to resolve the adverse effect of the projects on the historic properties.

THE SUCCESS

CTDOT and FHWA successfully balanced the charge of providing safe transportation and their responsibility to act as stewards of historic properties. As an outcome of the Section 106 process, the archaeological excavations of the four house sites recovered artifacts and broadened the context of the long-standing history of the state. By combining information from the four archaeological sites into one document, CTDOT crafted a narrative expanding what is known about life in the 18th century across the state. This publication was intentionally written to make it broadly appealing to the public. The book won an Award of Merit from the Connecticut League of History Organizations in 2015. Copies of the book were printed for distribution to schools, libraries, and historical societies in the communities in which the projects were located and to give away to interested members of the public. Due to the continuing demand, the book has been made available on the CTDOT website at www.ct.gov/dot/lib/dot/Highways_to_History.pdf. The Section 106 process enabled the recovery of important information of these colonial sites and provided a means for their insights on Connecticut’s early history and its people to be widely shared with the public.



Consulting Parties:

Federal Highway Administration
 Connecticut State Historic Preservation Officer
 Connecticut Department of Transportation
 Office of State Archaeology

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

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