

1976

Excavations at the Bull-Jackson Farmstead, Orange County, New York

Thomas J. Riley

Follow this and additional works at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha>

 Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Riley, Thomas J. (1976) "Excavations at the Bull-Jackson Farmstead, Orange County, New York," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 5 5, Article 3.

<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol5/iss1/3> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol5/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Northeast Historical Archaeology by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Excavations at the Bull-Jackson Farmstead, Orange County, New York

Thomas J. Riley

INTRODUCTION

In April 1974 students from the department of anthropology, New York University, conducted four days of archaeological testing at the Bull-Jackson Homestead in Orange County New York. The homestead was initially constructed by Thomas Bull, Goshen, New York, in 1769. It is presently being restored by the Orange County Department of Parks and Recreation, Graham Skea, Director. Upon completion of restoration the homestead will become a prominent feature of the Thomas Bull Memorial Park. The excavations at the Bull-Jackson Homestead were a minor part of this restoration program (Figure 1).

Excavations at the homestead were carried out over the course of two separate weekends in April by a crew of seven to nine students under the direction of the author. Three test trenches were excavated to depths of 2-3 feet below surface. The primary objectives of the test were to define the limits and nature of the old Goshen road (Fernow 1967:22) that runs across the present northern lawn of the homestead, paralleling the new route 416. While the validation of the location of the old road was one of the main goals of the excavations, an equally important end was the delineation of possible road border features such as stone wall footings, postholes, etc., in order to enhance and complete our understanding of the homestead grounds during the occupation of the house. The excavations were at least minimally successful in meeting these objectives. At least two separate phases of road building were recognized and road borders in the form of stone wall footings were uncovered, mapped and photographed.

The following pages present 1) a short discussion of roads and road construction in Colonial and Federal times, 2) a description of the site and excavation procedures, 3) the descrip-

tive results of the excavations, and 4) a short interpretation of the results of the excavation. It should be noted that the primary data relating to the Old Goshen road is incomplete owing to the exigencies of time and personnel. Nevertheless, the excavations give an accurate picture of road construction techniques employed along the section fronting the farmstead, including sequential phases of road building.

ROADS AND ROAD CONSTRUCTION

Roads in Colonial America were the products of an underdeveloped country. While road construction in the Old World, especially in Britain

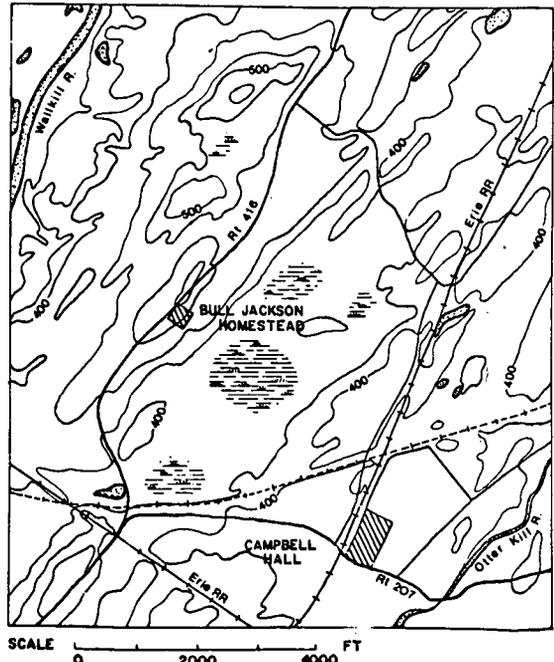


Figure 1 General Location map of Bull Jackson Homestead, Orange County, New York.

and Western-Europe, had the physical products of Roman engineering to maintain and improve upon, the colonies of the eastern seaboard of America were forced to develop lines of communication either by taking advantage of existing Indian trails and waterways or by cutting new trails across the wilderness. Roadbuilding was an underdeveloped science in the New World, and the roads that were constructed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were often little better than poorly defined tracts cut along the path of least resistance. Holmes (1934:259-61) describes the roads of New York before 1800 as being little more than broad routes with several braided tracks. Their courses changed slightly as ruts developed and topography allowed.

The earliest road building regulation in New York was enacted in 1664. The specifications for these initial roads were somewhat sketchy as the following quote attests (Hulbert 1902:37):

The Highways to be cleared as followeth, viz., the way to be made clear of standing trees, at least ten feet broad; all stumps and shrubs to be cut close to the ground—sufficient bridges to be made and kept over all marshy, swampy and difficult, dirty places. . . .

According to Holmes (1934:259) roads in New York were "underbrushed" on the highlands and "corduroyed" with dirt and logs through the marshy lowland areas until the turn of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the turnpike era. These early roads were not only dangerous in the spring, but they were a nuisance for the farmers who lived along them. The early benefits of living along a major highway were obvious access to towns and markets, social and cultural intercourse, etc. These benefits were offset, however, in the eighteenth century by two facts. The first was that the farmers were required by law to maintain the roads within the township or county in which they resided. The second was that, as long distance freighting increased in the eighteenth century, the farmers had to spend their time repairing roads. The haulers did the greatest amount of damage to the roads and they contributed no financial support to the construction and maintenance of the roads that they used in their operations. (Holmes 1934:262). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, construction and improvement were at first subsidized through lotteries. Later, major companies capitalized turnpike ventures throughout the state. The turnpike companies took their lead from the Lancaster Turnpike in Pennsylvania, one of the most modern roads in the western world when it was completed

in 1794. The construction of that road ushered in the age of the macadam road as well as the final form of crowns and ditches to America's roads. Then in the nineteenth century (towards 1840) the plank paved road was introduced by Geddes, but it proved difficult and expensive to maintain and was not, in the long run, feasible over long distances (Holmes 1934:264).

The questions that were asked before the excavations at the Bull-Jackson Farmstead revolved around the kind of road that was represented there. The road types recognized in the excavations would give a fairly good indication of the dates of road construction and rebuilding. A crown and ditch formation or a macadam or crushed rock surfacing would indicate an early nineteenth century construction date. A rough rock based bed with no ditches and no crushed rock paving would represent an eighteenth century roadbed.

THE SITE

The Bull-Jackson Homestead is located on the south side of route 416 about half way between Goshen and Montgomery, New York. The homestead is situated on a high point of land (485-501 msl.) above the watershed of the Walkill River (Figure 2).

The homestead presently consists of a farmhouse, a barn, several outbuildings, and three wells. Two wells are situated on the northwest side of the house and are capped. The third well is located in the front of the house and is still used. The farmhouse is the oldest building on the property, with its initial construction apparently dating to 1769. There is some evidence that an earlier structure occupied the site, but no surface indications of this structure have been found (Fernow 1967:22).

A semicircular driveway cuts through the lawn of the homestead, from route 416. On the western end of the present lawn of the homestead there are surface indications of the old Goshen road. Here the road cut shows up as two parallel hummocks 28 feet apart running southwest-northeast across the western part of the property. The road depression is interrupted by the existing semicircular driveway with the old road barely visible on the east side of the property beyond the present drive. The area between the hummocks is depressed slightly. Three excavated trenches were designed to cut across the road bed at two loci. Trenches I and II were located at the southwest end of the property while trench III was located at the northeast end where the road was thought to continue.

A three foot square grid was set up with the

BULL JACKSON HOMESTEAD

MAY 15, 1970

CONTOUR INTERVAL = ONE FOOT

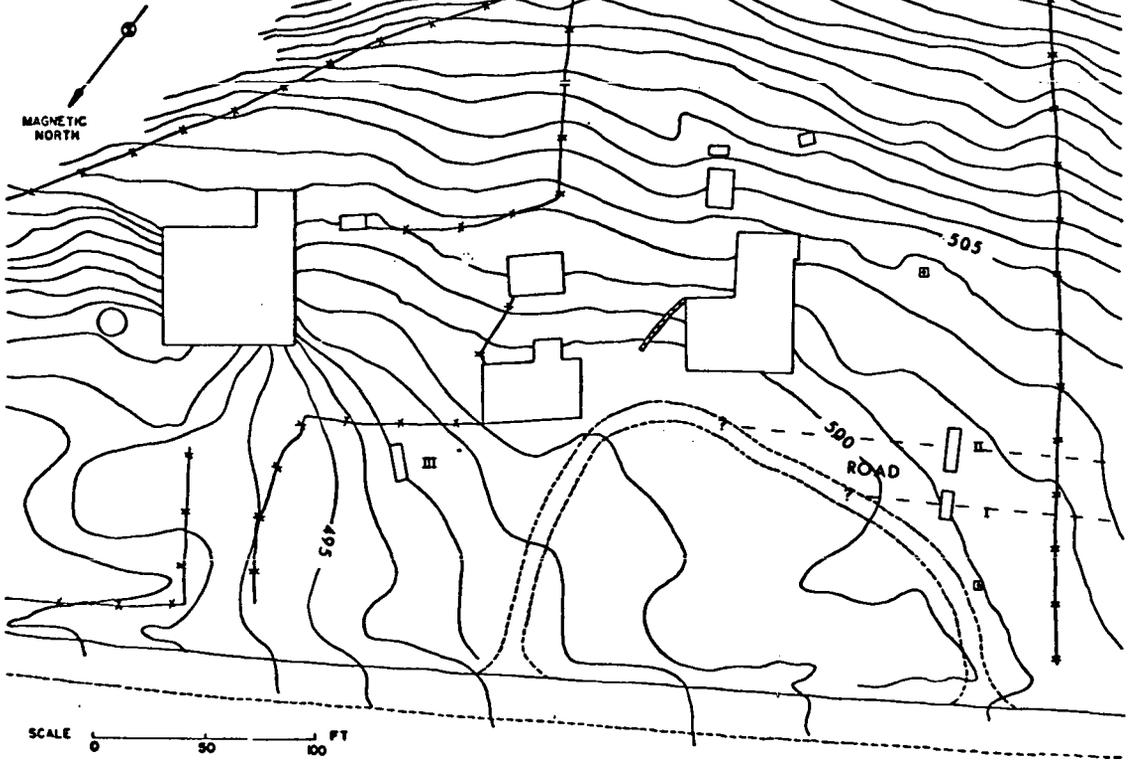


Figure 2 Road alignment and archaeological Trenches, Bull Jackson Homestead.

north corner of the well cap A as datum point. The grid was based on a northeast baseline oriented 60° east of magnetic north. The grid was labelled A through Z on this axis and 1 through infinity on the northeast-southwest axis which was oriented 150° east of north. Within the grid, Trenches I and II represented a discontinuous line along the set of F squares. Trench III was excavated hurriedly during the last day and was not tied into the grid orientation.

Excavations in Trenches I and II proceeded in arbitrary 2" levels until structural features or stratigraphy were noted. In Trench III artifacts were recorded in terms of the excavation unit as a whole and in terms of natural stratigraphic level.

THE EXCAVATIONS

No artifacts were recorded from the sod zone which constituted the first level in the excavations. The stratigraphy of Trench III was simple and not indicative of anything but generalized disturbance and has not been presented here; it

is possible that the road cut is located to the north of this last trench. Stratigraphic profiles of Trenches I and II are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Trench I (Figure 3)

Trench I (12 feet long X 3 feet wide) was excavated through grid squares F12, F13, and F14. It was placed across the slight rise on the northwest of the road embankment and continued southeast into the roadbed. The stratigraphy of this particular trench was the most complex of the three that were dug and a profile is presented in Figure 3.

The stratigraphy of Trench I outlines fairly well the phases of road construction postulated at the end of the general section on roads and roadbuilding and is presented below.

Two features were noted in Trench I. Feature 1 was located in square F11 and consisted of fist sized cobbles from the glacial till, piled haphazardly in a double layer. The stones were located at the interface of levels 1 and 2 and

Table 1

Level	Depth (below surface)	Description
0	2" to 3"	A ⁰ and A ¹ soil horizons; heavy sod and thick root zone in dark brown humic topsoil.
1	3" var. to 8" to 15"	Lighter brown soil with angular shale pebbles; shale crushed and uniform in size; well drained; in F12 this horizon intrudes into layer 2.
Interface between 1 and 2	8" to 10" interrupted by Feature 2	In F11 the interface is marked by first sized stones, apparently the remains of rubble marking road boundary (Feature 1). Feature 2, a ditch on the NE side of road, was dug from this level; in F13 and F14 the interface is marked by scattered crushed shale lying on level 2.
2a	10" to 13"	Orange brown compact silt with some brick fragments; Feature 2 intrudes into this level. In F14 fist sized stones delineate surface.
2b	13" to 16"	Compact light yellow till, apparently sterile. Feature 2 intrudes into this layer.

apparently represent a rubble border for the road on its northwest side. The rubble measured 2 feet northwest-southeast and only a few inches high.

Feature 2 was a 15" deep depression located in the profile in square F12, immediately to the southeast of feature 1. It apparently represents a drainage ditch placed on the northwest side of the road.

Trench II

Trench II (18 foot long X 3 foot wide) extended through squares F19 to F24. The excavation traversed the border of the road on its southeast side and exhibited a fairly simple stratigraphy marked again by the appearance of a rubble bordering wall. The stratigraphy is presented in Table 2.

At the interface between layers 1 and 2 there were fist sized stones that apparently were the remains of a rubble road border such as the one noted in Feature 2. In the western wall of Trench II, a layer of angular fist sized glacial cobbles were noted in the interface between levels 1 and 2.

Trench III

The stratigraphy of Trench III was simple and consisted of the sod zone, which extended to approximately 3 inches below the surface, and a disturbed brown topsoil, which extended to 5 inches below the surface where there was a sharp interface with a mottled brown subsoil. The excavation was not continued into the mottled subsoil for lack of time.

ARTIFACTS

Few artifacts were recovered from the excavations at the homestead. A number of nails were recovered from the excavations above the road surface. Three pottery sherds were recovered from Trench II. Two badly fragmented ball clay pipestem fragments were also recovered from the apparent rubble wall feature in Trench II. None of the artifacts were diagnostic in terms of the age of road construction.

INTERPRETATIONS

As was mentioned above, the excavations through the road at the Bull-Jackson farmstead were restricted both in time and personnel and thus only a minimal conclusion about the nature of the road and its relation to the house can be offered.

Table 2

Level	Depth (below surface)	Description
0	2" to 3"	Sod Zone; thick roots, dark brown humic layer.
1	3" to 5"	Little change from sod zone; this layer distinguished by lack of roots from grass and heavily disturbed by tree root intrusion; rubble road border in F21 and F22.
2	5" to 12"-15"	yellow compact silt sand.

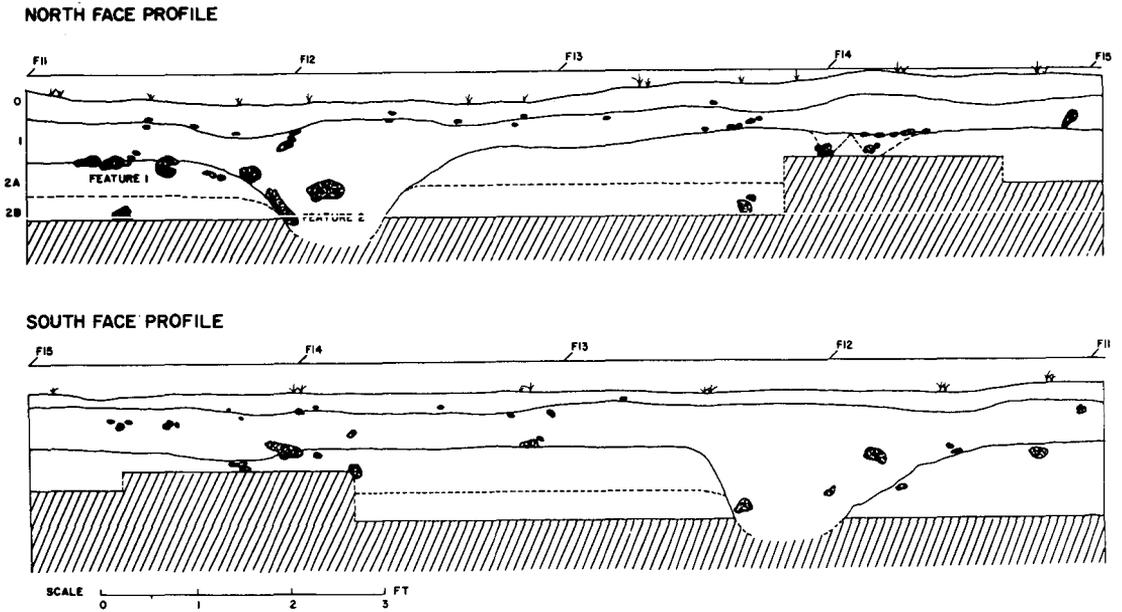


Figure 3 Stratigraphy in Trench I, Bull Jackson Homestead.

The excavation profiles from Trenches I and II reveal an apparent two-stage construction for the Goshen road as it crossed the present day Bull-Jackson property.

The first stage is represented in the stone fill at the 2A level in Trench I and at the interface between levels 1 and 2 in the west wall of Trench II. This is interpreted as an initial highland road bed consisting of large fist sized stones embedded in the original surface of the landscape. The stones were probably placed there to ensure a stable bed during wet springs.

The second stage is represented by the interface between level 1 and level 2A. The crushed shale

rock noted here, the presence of an apparent drainage ditch, and the construction of the rubble road borders are apparently related cultural phenomena. Their stratigraphic relationship indicates that they were part of the second construction stage of the road, and the lack of level 2B in Trench II suggests that the road alignment had shifted slightly southward in this stage of construction. One of the larger stones in the rubble road border in Trench II exhibited plow scars which indicates that it had been removed from an agricultural field for deposition at the road side.

The single drainage ditch represented by fea-

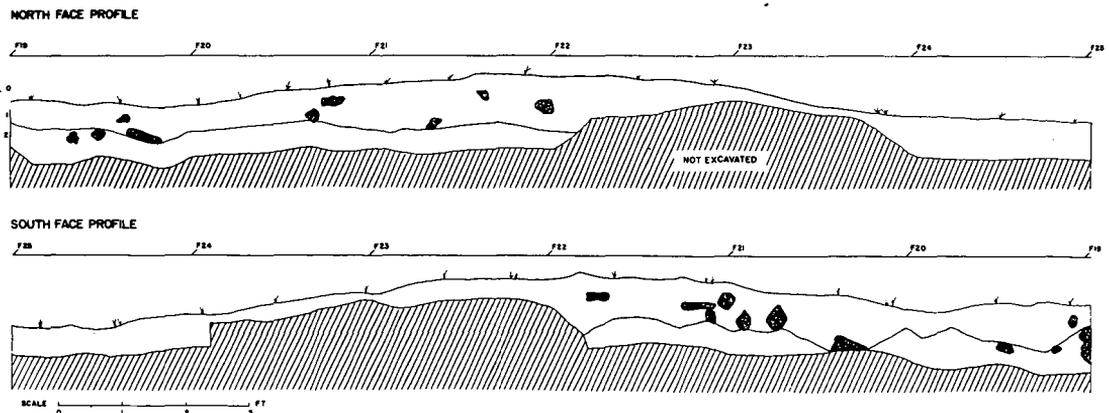


Figure 4 Stratigraphy in Trench II, Bull Jackson Homestead.

ture 2 was placed on the lower slope of the road during construction stage 2. The road itself measured 28 feet in width from one stone rubble border to the other with a crown less than 18 feet wide.

While dates for the stages of construction of the road cannot be positively fixed, the first stage of road construction may have been before 1769, the construction of the original homestead. The second stage can be safely placed after 1792, as it shows features that were introduced to America with the building of the Lancaster Turnpike. Features include a crowned road with parallel drainage ditch and the use of crushed rock surfacing, albeit the last feature is noted only sparingly in both profile and excavation plan. The rubble borders apparently date to this

second construction stage and serve to delineate the legal width of roads in New York.

REFERENCES

- Fernow, Berthold (editor).
1967 *Calendar of Wills: 1626-1836*. Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore.
- Holmes, Oliver W.
1934 The Turnpike Era. In *History of the State of New York*, edited by Alexander Flick, Vol. 5, pp. 255-94. Columbia University Press, New York.
- Hulbert, A. B.
1902 *Indian Thoroughfares. In Historic Highways of America*, Vol. 2. A. H. Clark Co., Cleveland.