Previous Studies of the Piscataway Commons, Town Green, or Training Ground Commons

The initial historical study conducted in 2009 determined that the commons currently consists of burial ground and recreational parkland, nestled within sprawling suburban residential and commercial development. Though the landscape around it has drastically transformed over the past 300 years, the commons itself offers a unique opportunity to historically and archaeologically examine aspects of town life in 17th- and 18th-century Piscataway (now Edison), New Jersey.

The Township of Piscataway was among the earliest colonial settlements in the State of New Jersey. Sited on the north bank of the Raritan River, the original boundaries of the town, dating to 1666, stretched from Woodbridge in the east, to Westfield Township in the north, and the Raritan River in the south and west. It once boasted some 42,944 acres (67.1 square miles) and contained several small hamlets, the first of which was the village of Piscataway, the town's governmental and judicial center. This center surrounded the Piscataway commons. Since 1870, land within the township was annexed to form the smaller municipalities of Dunellen, South Plainfield, Middlesex, and Raritan (now Edison, Metuchen, and Highland Park), most of which rapidly developed as distant suburbs of New York City during the 20th century. The small community of Piscataway village remained within Piscataway Township until 1870 when it was incorporated into Raritan Township, later renamed Edison Township in 1954, in honor of famed inventor Thomas Edison. The historical study focused on the town green, which bounds the south, east, and west sides of St. James Episcopal Church. Located between the Raritan River and Woodbridge Avenue (County Route 514), formerly known as the High Road, the small, 7.67-acre tract contained the town or meeting house, a militia training ground, ammunition magazine, jail, stocks, a nineteenth-century schoolhouse, a burial ground established in the late 17th century, and by 1724 the St. James Episcopal Church (Figures 1-5). The historical study indicated the British Army used the original St. James Episcopal Church as a barrack and hospital between December 1, 1776 and June 23, 1777 and that a skirmish took place on or near the town green during the Revolutionary War. Numerous British soldiers killed during the skirmish were interred in an unmarked mass burial within the burial ground. The historical study also revealed that the original Piscataway settlement around the commons was established as a New England-style nucleated town, influenced by New England settlement migration to the town during its creation in the 1660s (Gall 2009, 2011b).

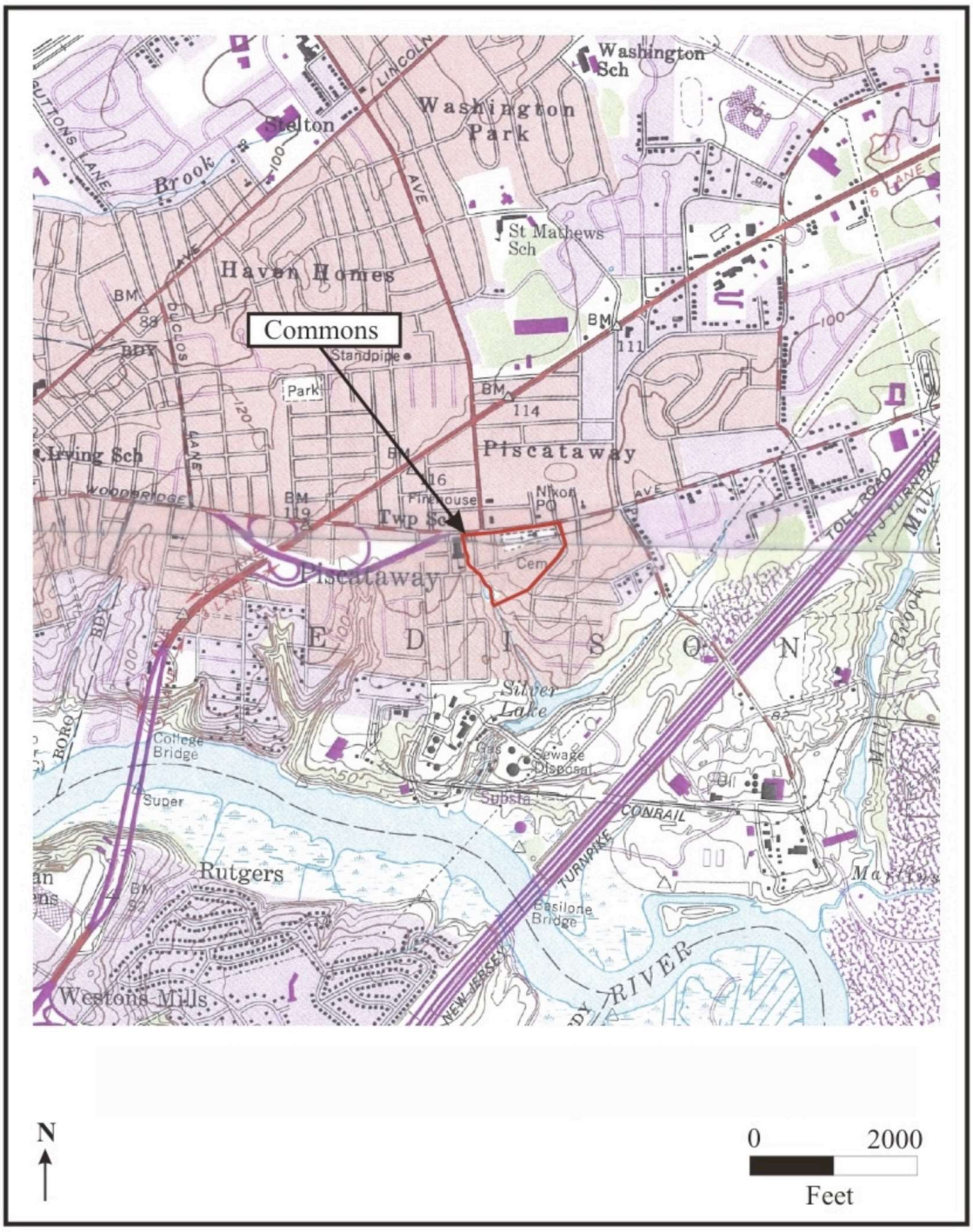

Figure 3: U.S.G.S. Map Showing the Location of the ca. 1696 Piscataway Commons (U.S.G.S. 1954 7.5' Quadrangle: New Brunswick, NJ (Photorevised 1981) and 1955 7.5' Quadrangle: Plainfield, NJ (Photorevised 1981).

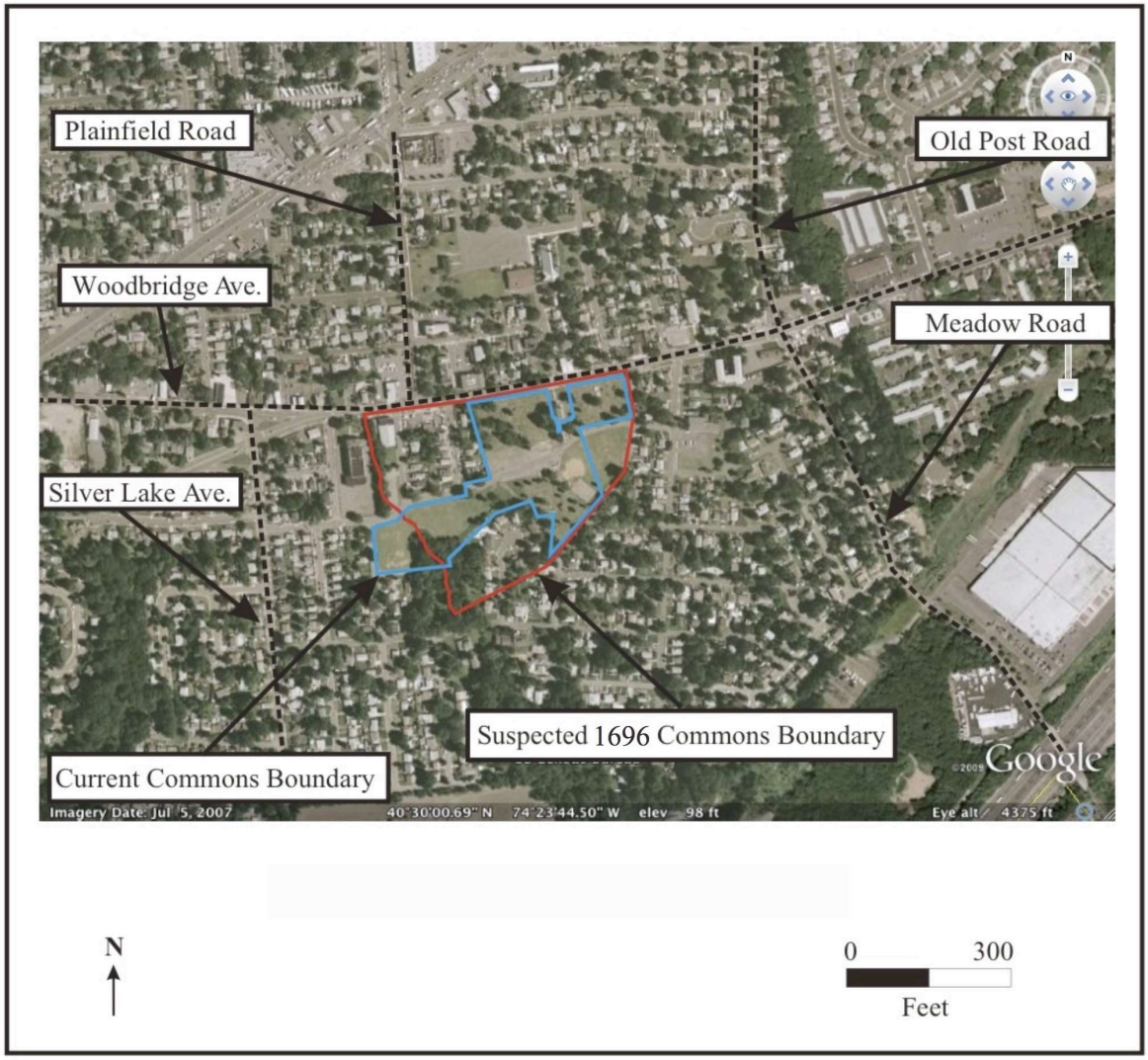

Figure 4: 2007 Google, Aerial Showing Current and ca. 1696 Commons Boundary.

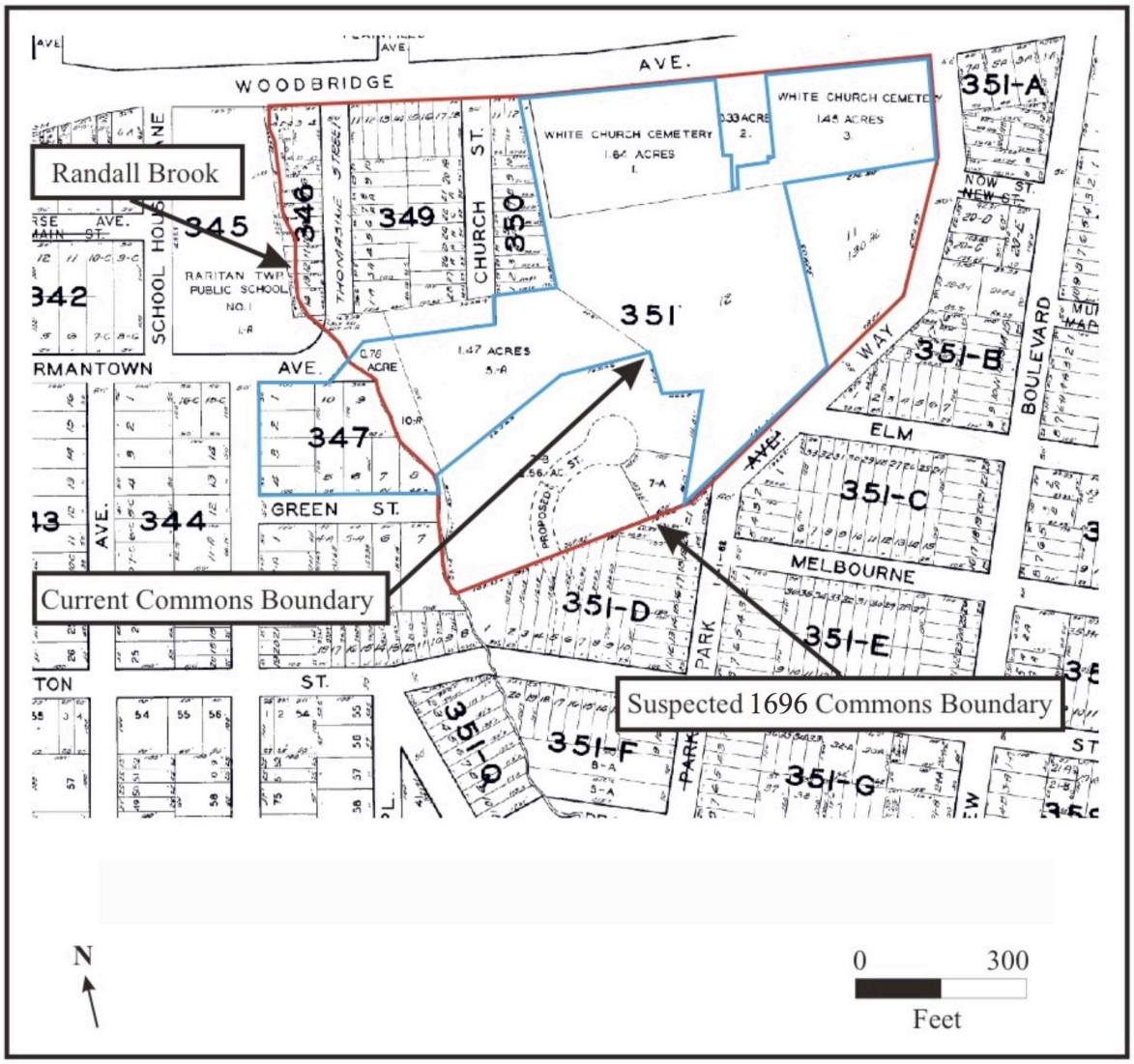

Figure 5: 1967 Tax Map, Edison Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey.

In 2011, the Battlefield Restoration and Archaeological Volunteer Organization conducted metal detection on Block 347, and Block 351, Lots 5-A and 12, and portions of Lots 1 and 3 (Gall 2011a). The metal detection survey did not include the current study area due to lack of permission to enter property owned by the Rector, Wardens and Vestrymen of the St. James Episcopal Church at the time. The survey was conducted to determine if traces of 17th- through 19th-century buildings were present in the existing town green and if any evidence for Revolutionary War military activity exists in the commons. The survey consisted of metal detection and the excavation of 11 hand dug shovel test pits to evaluate the effects of soil formation processes in the town green on the metal detection survey (Figures 6 and 7). The survey revealed that deep modern fills were present in Block 347 and Block 351, Lot 5-A and in all but the eastern portion of Lot 12, which prevented an adequate metal detection survey from taking place in those areas. Lots 1, 3 and the eastern portion of Lot 12 on Block 351 contained shallow fill layers over an historic buried A or buried plowzone layer, which yielded wrought nails, possibly associated with a former building near Woodbridge Avenue, railroad spikes related to a former trolley line that existed along Woodbridge Avenue, a military button on Lot 1, and the recovery of 20th-century trash on Block 347 and Lots 5-A and 12 on Block 351.

In 2014 and 2015, Michael J. Gall engaged in a mapping and recordation survey of all grave markers in the Piscataway town Burial Ground. The survey recorded the location of 1,816 grave markers via a sub-meter GPS unit and grave marker epitaph inscriptions. One goal of the study was to assess the approximate location of former buildings that may have stood in the burial ground based on an examination of grave locations during certain time periods. The data from the survey suggests one or more buildings may have stood in the eastern portion of the Piscataway town Burial Ground on Block 351, Lot 3 prior to the 1835 tornado that destroyed the first St. James Episcopal Church. Indeed, a building may have stood in this portion of the cemetery as early as the 1690s (Figures 8 and 9).

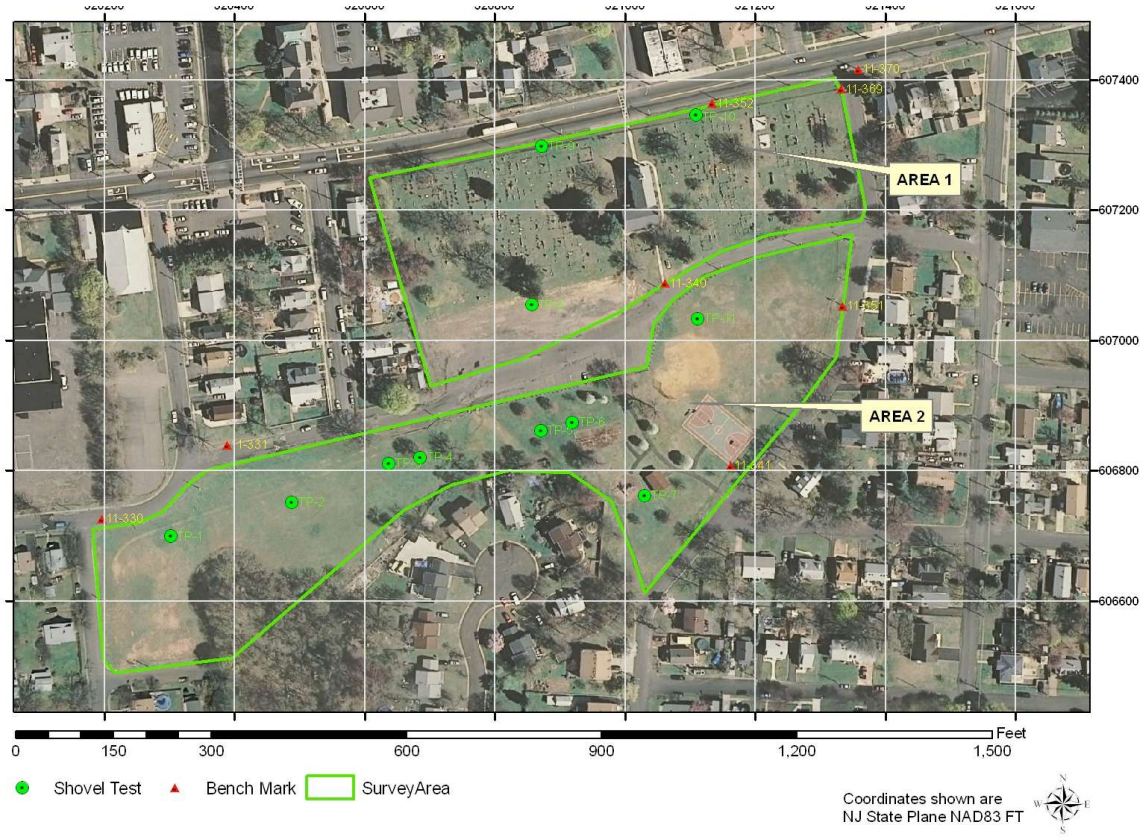

Figure 6: Metal Detector Survey Shovel Test Pit Map (Gall 2011a)

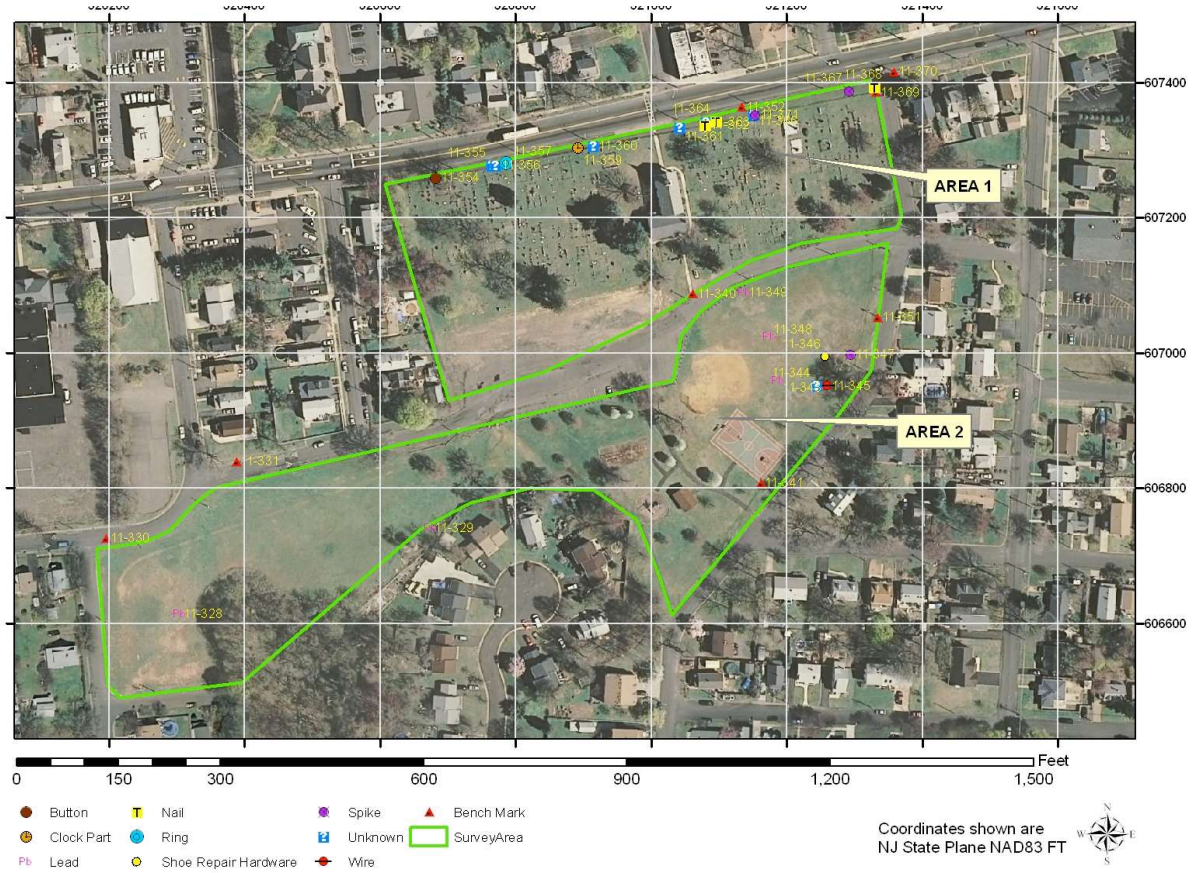

Figure 7: Metal Detector Survey Artifact Location Map (Gall 2011a).

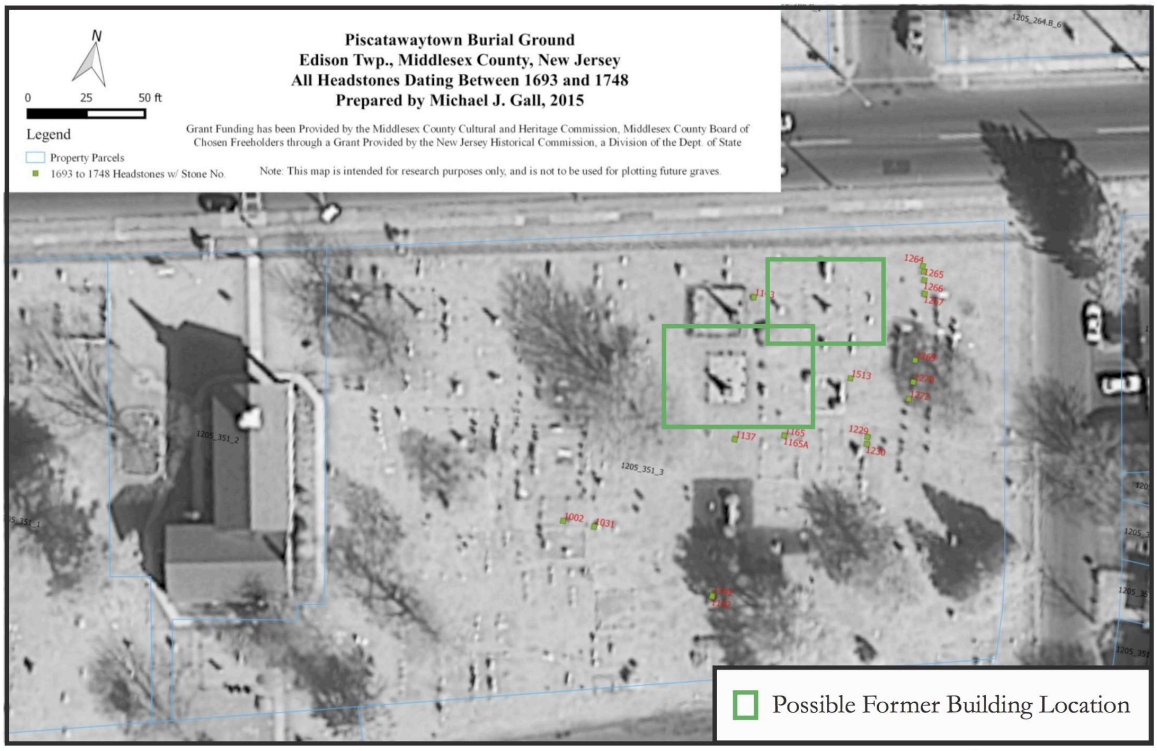

Figure 8: Location of Grave Markers Dating between 1693 and 1748 in the Eastern Portion of the Piscataway town Burial Ground Showing Suspected Former Building Locations (Gall 2015).

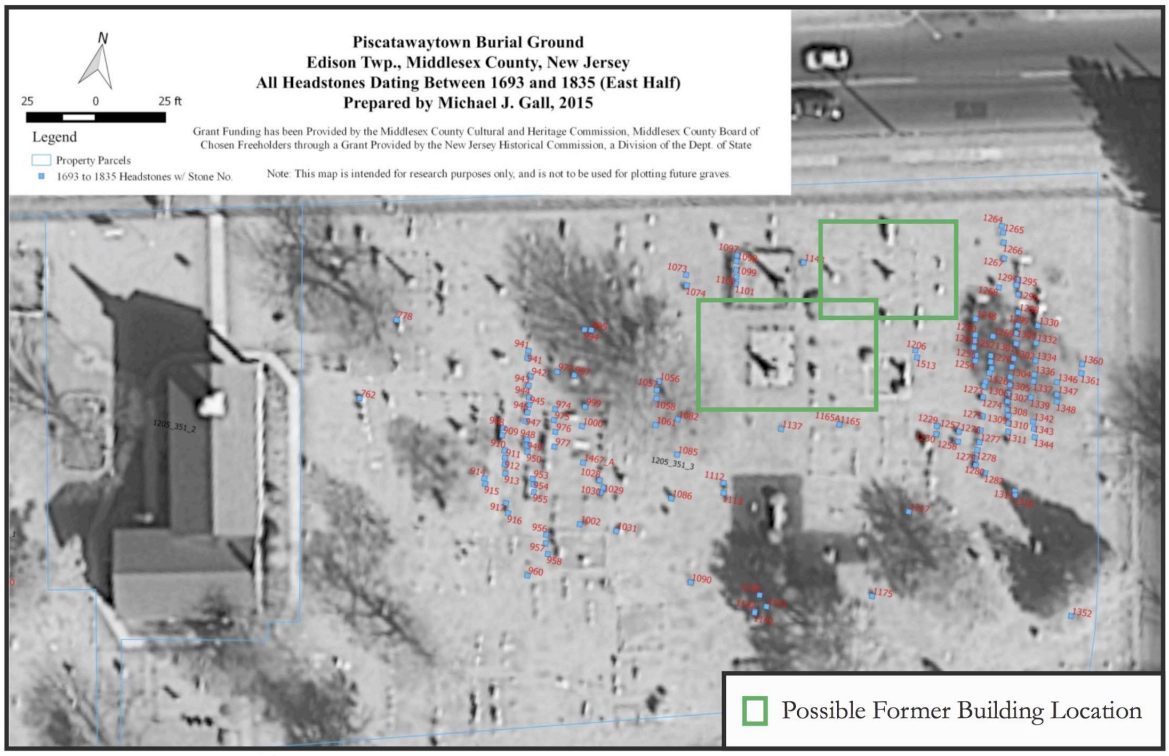

Figure 9: Location of Grave Markers Dating between 1693 and 1835 in the Eastern Portion of the Piscataway town Burial Ground Showing Suspected Former Building Locations (Gall 2015).

CHAPTER 2: Research Design

The focus of this public archaeological study is to examine a portion of Block 351, Lot 11 to determine if intact archaeological deposits are present associated with the 17th- through 19th-century municipal use of the property when the parcel was part of the town green. If present do those deposits shed light on historic municipal use of the town green? Do archaeological deposits reveal encroachment activities by neighboring property owners? The study was also conducted to determine if prehistoric Native American archaeological deposits are present in the eastern portion of Block 351, Lot 11. Is there evidence of prehistoric Native American occupation in the study area? If so, can the time period and function of the occupation be determined? The results of the study may be used as a planning tool to preserve identified, intact archaeological deposits.

This study incorporates data from three previous historical and archaeological studies undertaken in the existing and abutting town green (Gall 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2015). Archaeological site files at the New Jersey State Museum (NJSM) and the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (NJHPO) were also reviewed to determine if any archaeological sites had been previously identified in or adjacent to the study area or if any cultural resources surveys has been undertaken in or adjacent to the study area. Background research was also undertaken at various repositories to collect data for the creation of an historical context to be used for the interpretation of identified archaeological deposits. Data from the metal detection survey conducted in 2011 on Block 351, Lot 12 suggested that one or more layers of modern 20th-century fill may cap a buried A-Horizon on Block 351, Lot 11, which would prevent an adequate metal detection survey from taking place (Gall 2011a).

The archaeological study was conducted through the excavation of 12 shovel test pits (STPs) excavated at 50-foot intervals in the eastern portion of Block 351, Lot 11. Shovel test pits were numbered consecutively from 1 to 12. An additional two STPs were excavated at 10-foot intervals. These STPs were each given a numerical designation and a direction suffix based on its relation of a nearby STP (e.g., STP 11N and 11S). Shovel test pits measured 1.5-feet square and were dug into the B1 or B21t-horizon. Soils encountered were separately excavated by stratum and each stratum was screened through ¼-inch wire mesh to facilitate artifact recovery. Recovered artifacts from individual contexts were placed into re-sealable polyethylene bags with and accompanied with a tag that lists the appropriate provenience information. The characteristics of all

stratigraphy encountered, such as thickness, depth, texture, and munsell color were recorded on standardized field forms. Soils encountered were compared to data from the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Where soil attributes corresponded between on-site soils and NRCS listed soils, the NRCS soil designation was utilized. An STP log is present in Appendix B. Shovel test pits were backfilled upon completion and the ground surface was restored to its natural contours. All STPs were plotted on a project excavation map. Documentation of existing conditions and fieldwork was conducted via digital photography.

Potentially intact archaeological deposits identified in STPs were further investigated with the use of two hand-dug three-foot square excavation units (EUs). Excavation units were given numerical designations (e.g., EUs 1 and 2). Stratigraphy in the EUs was excavated with trowels and flat shovels. Particularly compact deposits were loosened with a sharp shooter to enable hand excavation. All soils encountered were recorded on standardized field forms and characteristics such as depth, thickness, munsell color, and texture were noted. Soils were excavated in natural stratigraphic levels, with the exception of intact historical soil deposits that contained 18th- or 19th-century cultural material. Upon completion, EU wall profiles were documented via scaled line drawings and digital photography. Identified cultural features were documented in plan and were separately excavated. Cultural features were given numerical designations. All soils excavated in EUs were separately screened by stratum and/or level through ¼-inch wire mesh to facilitate artifact recovery and to prevent context mixing. Artifacts were placed in re-sealable polyethylene bags with an accompanying tag that lists the appropriate provenience information. All EUs were backfilled upon completion and the ground surface was restored to its original contours.

Recovered artifacts were processed, cleaned, analyzed, and cataloged according to provenience, function, material, type, and class. Where possible, manufacturing periods and other descriptive data was assigned to each artifact. No artifacts were discarded. The artifact catalog for recovered material is present in Appendix C. All artifacts were given a numerical bag log number according to provenience context. Artifacts associated with an identified archaeological were also given catalog and lot numbers according to provenience context and artifact type. An attempt was made to mark all artifacts associated with an archaeological site with the tri-nomial site registration number and catalog number. Identified archaeological sites were registered with the New Jersey State Museum. The archaeological site registration form is present in Appendix D. All artifacts