

Research at the Crawford House Have we found the slave burial ground?

2/18/2009

The New Jersey Geological Survey sent a team of experts to the Crawford House today to conduct ground-penetrating surveys in an attempt to verify the location of a 17th century African-American burial ground believed to be on the property. Old deeds and other documents tell us that a burial ground for slaves from the Tinton Manor Iron Works existed on the Crawford property, but this was the first attempt to locate it and determine if graves could be identified.

The researchers first laid out a grid on the surface marking the area they wanted to test, using information from maps and surveys of the property. They then used an electro-magnetic scanner to identify sub-surface anomalies, and two different types of ground-penetrating radar to further delineate those anomalies. Preliminary results of the tests show areas where excavation has occurred, which could possibly be burials. The next step will be to conduct hands-on archaeology in those areas, to determine if in fact the excavation was due to a burial or burials. Because several centuries have passed since slaves from the iron works were buried there, many other activities could explain the excavation. But these test results are promising, and we plan to pursue archaeology to see if we have at last located the burial ground.

The Historic Commission has long wanted to identify the cemetery, and will be working this summer with a local boy scout to mark its boundaries and provide interpretive signage to explain its importance. With renovations to the house proceeding, it has become urgent that we know where the cemetery was, so that we can make plans for the site that will avoid any encroachment upon it. This testing is an important step forward in that process. Stay tuned for developments!



The preliminary electro-magnetic survey underway



Some of the grids as they were laid out; they continued to the rear of the property



Clearing the area in preparation for the ground-penetrating radar



Researchers analyze the read-out from the ground-penetrating radar



A second ground-penetrating radar unit being moved into position for another round of testing