

REPORT:
PHASE I ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY
HEBRON VILLAGE GREEN DEVELOPMENT
HEBRON, CONNECTICUT

Prepared for Nathan L. Jacobson & Associates, Inc.

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IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Hebron was settled shortly after 1700, principally by families from Windsor, Connecticut, and was incorporated as a separate town in 1708. The town grew slowly in the 18th century through natural increase and the arrival of additional settlers, and by mid-century was characterized by farmsteads scattered throughout the entire area of the town and a small village center, near the present-day intersection of State Routes 66 and 85, where there was a Congregational meetinghouse, the town pound, a district school, a tavern, the town common, and a little further south, a burying ground.

Although in the 19th century Hebron had a few water-powered industries, including an iron furnace at North Pond and a silk mill in the Turnerville (Amston) section, nearly all of the town was in agricultural use until the very recent past. Like most of the Connecticut countryside, Hebron was characterized by near-subsistence general-purpose family farms in the 18th and 19th centuries, with some movement toward dairy, egg, and orchard specialization in the early 20th century. It is likely that the project area has been in continual agricultural use for at least two centuries. Some of it was planted in corn at the time of the survey, and an early 20th-century photograph (Figure 5) shows a mixture of woods, plowed land, and orchard trees.

Without assembling a complete chain of title for the property, which is outside of the scope of work of a Reconnaissance Survey, the property cannot be definitively associated with any particular Hebron farming family. However, 19th-century maps show a homestead just to the west labeled "Henry Peters" in 1857 (Figure 2) and "H. Peters" in 1869 (Figure 3). The project area lies to the east and also directly south of the Peters house. It is likely that much if not all of the project area was associated with the Peters family in the 19th century, but deed research would be required to confirm this.

Henry Peters (ca. 1788-1862) was listed in the 1850 census as a farm laborer and in the 1860 census as a farmer. Living immediately adjacent to him at the time of the 1860 census was his son Horace Peters (ca. 1815-1881), also a farmer; Horace Peters's household also included his 102-year-old maternal grandmother Betsy Adams Peters (U.S. Census Office 1860a). The Peters family had a small but productive farming operation, of which father Henry Peters owned 5 acres and son Horace Peters 40 acres, with a total value of \$1,300 (U.S. Census Office 1860b). Taken together, the Peters had 2 cows, a yoke of oxen, and 1 hog; the value of slaughtered livestock in 1860 was \$89. Their acreage allowed them to produce 52 bushels of corn, 24 bushels of potatoes, 8 bushels of buckwheat, 250 pounds of butter, \$50 of orchard products, and 7 tons of hay. This was probably adequate to sustain the members of the Peters's two households and their animals and perhaps even allowed a small marketable surplus of butter and cider.

Henry Peters was in his seventies when he died in August of 1862. The inventory of his possessions at the time (Hebron Probate District 1862, Appendix II) suggests a man of modest means with a respectable amount of clothing, bedding, furniture, and tools, as well as a small amount of cash. Like that of any farmer of the period, Henry Peters's estate included provisions for later consumption: packed pork, salted fish, and one hog on the hoof. After his death, the house and five acres passed to his son Horace. We know that Horace Peters eventually left Hebron, since he died in Hartford in 1881 (Brown and Rose 1980).

Without a comprehensive chain of title for the project area, one can only speculate how far

back the Peters family occupied this property. However, it is known that Henry Peters was the sole residual heir of the estate of his father Caesar Peters (ca. 1750-1814), whose possessions included a two-story house, a small barn, and two acres of land (Andover Probate District 1814). Since Caesar Henry's widow Sim (Henry Peters step-mother) died a few months after her husband, it is possible that Henry Peters, then in his mid-twenties, inherited part of this property from his father.

Caesar Peters was also a man of modest but not insubstantial means. His estate inventory (Appendix II) indicates not only generalized farming activities – making cheese, packing meat, pressing cider, and growing various grains – but also he may have made a specialty of brewing, since he had 34 porter bottles at the time of his death (porter was the traditional dark, bitter beer of England and early America). In addition to the usual bedding, furniture, tools, and other household items, Caesar Peters's possessions included a fair amount of nice clothing, such as a napped hat and four vests, one made of silk and one of kerseymere, a fine wool fabric. He also had a china tea service.

Address/location → Hebron Village Ctr.

Caesar Peters's life was an eventful one. He was purchased as a slave by Mary Peters at the age of eight and later, when a young man, was sold to her son, the Rev. Samuel A. Peters, the notorious Tory propagandist. At the time of the Revolution, Samuel Peters left for England and all his property, including his slaves, was confiscated by the State of Connecticut. After the war, Samuel Peters, still in England, expressed some intention to free Caesar but sold him and his family to David Prior of South Carolina. In 1787 Prior attempted to claim his slaves, but only got as far as Norwich, where a group of Hebron men prevented him from taking them away, under the pretext that Caesar could not be let go because of money he owed to a tailor in Hebron. In 1789 Caesar and his family were granted their freedom by the General Assembly. The following year he sued his would-be owner David Prior for £1,000 in damages, but dropped the suit before it could come to trial. Altogether, Caesar Peters and his wife Lois had ten children. After her death in 1793, he remarried a widow named Sim. Although he also lived in the nearby towns of Tolland and Colchester, he lived most of his life in Hebron, where he died in his sixties in 1814 (biographical details from ~~Brown and Rose 1980: 300-301~~).

Text for website

The nearest house to the project area, 110 Main Street, lies just to the west on State Route 66 (Figure 6). A two-story frame gable-roofed dwelling with a clapboard and wood-shingle exterior, it measures 24' by 24' in plan, with a 12' by 36' rear ell. The house has several related outbuildings, including a farm stand and garage. According to the Hebron Assessor's estimate, the house was built about 1830; if this is correct, then the shingled open porch across the front and the large shed dormer on the front slope of the roof must be alterations, probably made about 1920. Because of the extent of alterations, which compromise its integrity of design, it does not appear eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of the project area indicates potentially significant archaeological resources associated with the late 18th to early 19th century are present within the area to be impacted by the proposed Village Green project. These materials include two concentrations of domestic refuse and architectural debris, along a vestigial dirt roadway, approximately 200 meters south of State Route 66, and within the proposed recreation center area. Background research suggests that the artifacts may be associated with the 19th-century Peters family occupation or possibly an earlier occupation. The Phase I data is insufficient to determine whether the assemblage of historic-period artifacts is associated with an undocumented house within the project area or the result of the disposal of refuse from a house on the main road (one of the Peters houses still stands just outside the project area). The initial analysis of artifacts, particularly the creamware, suggests an occupation that would be consistent with that of Caesar Peters, but further documentary research would be necessary to substantiate the association. As the archaeology of Connecticut freedmen and African Americans in general is in its infancy, intact archaeological deposits that could be firmly associated with the Peters occupation would have great importance.

For this reason PAST recommends that the two areas of early historic-period artifact concentrations be further investigated in the form of a Phase II Intensive Archaeological study. We recommend more intensive subsurface archaeological investigations to conclusively determine the presence of a house or other structure within the area. In addition, we propose more intensive documentary research, a title research that could confirm the association of the property with the Peters or, alternatively, another Hebron farming family. Deed research might also provide a more detailed description of potentially significant lanes, buildings, and other features that once stood on the property.

Figure 2: Project area projected onto the 1857 Eaton and Osborn Tolland County map. The project area is closest to the house indicated as the property of Henry Peters.

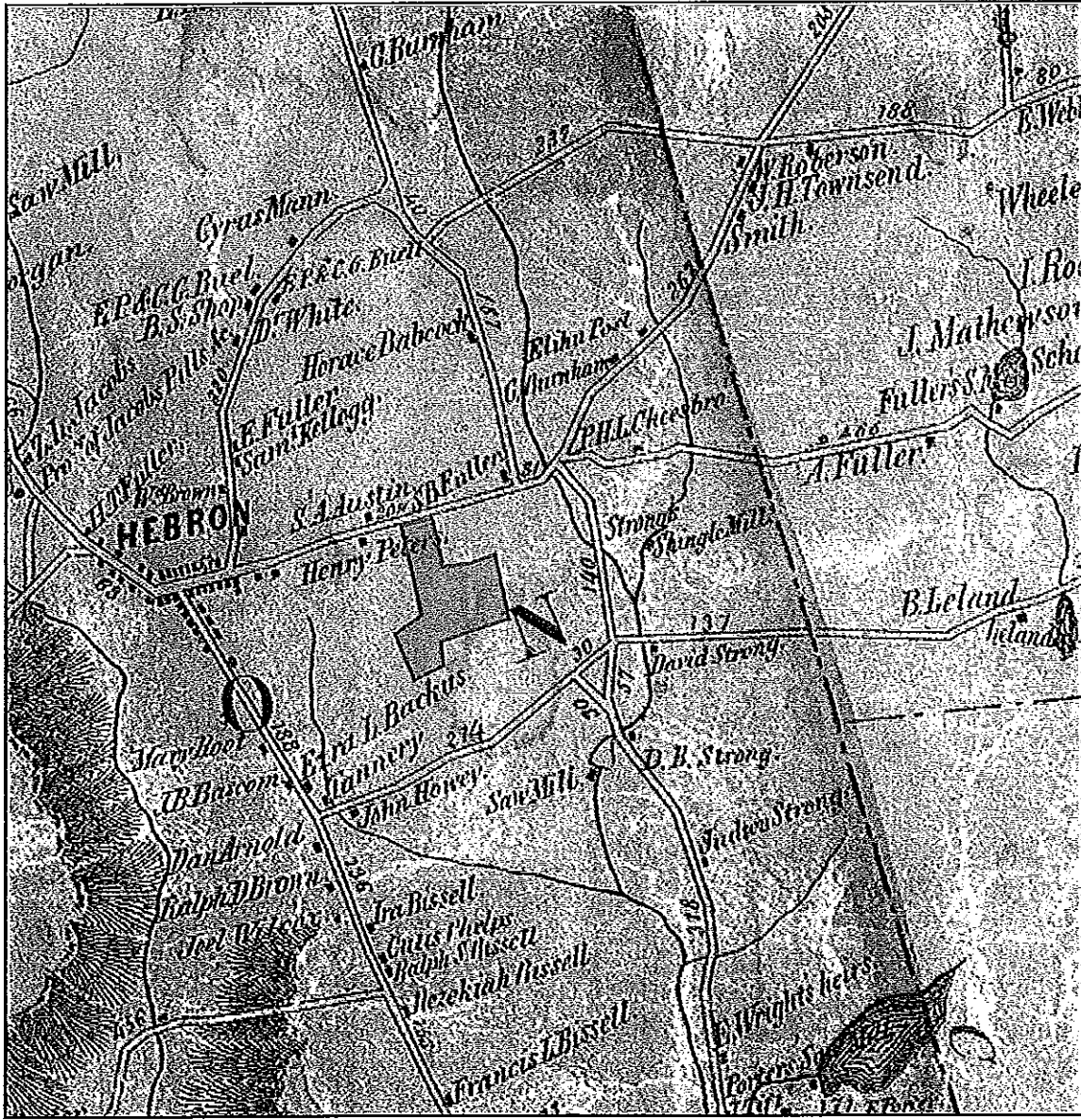


Figure 5: Project area projected onto the 1934 Fairchild aerial photograph.

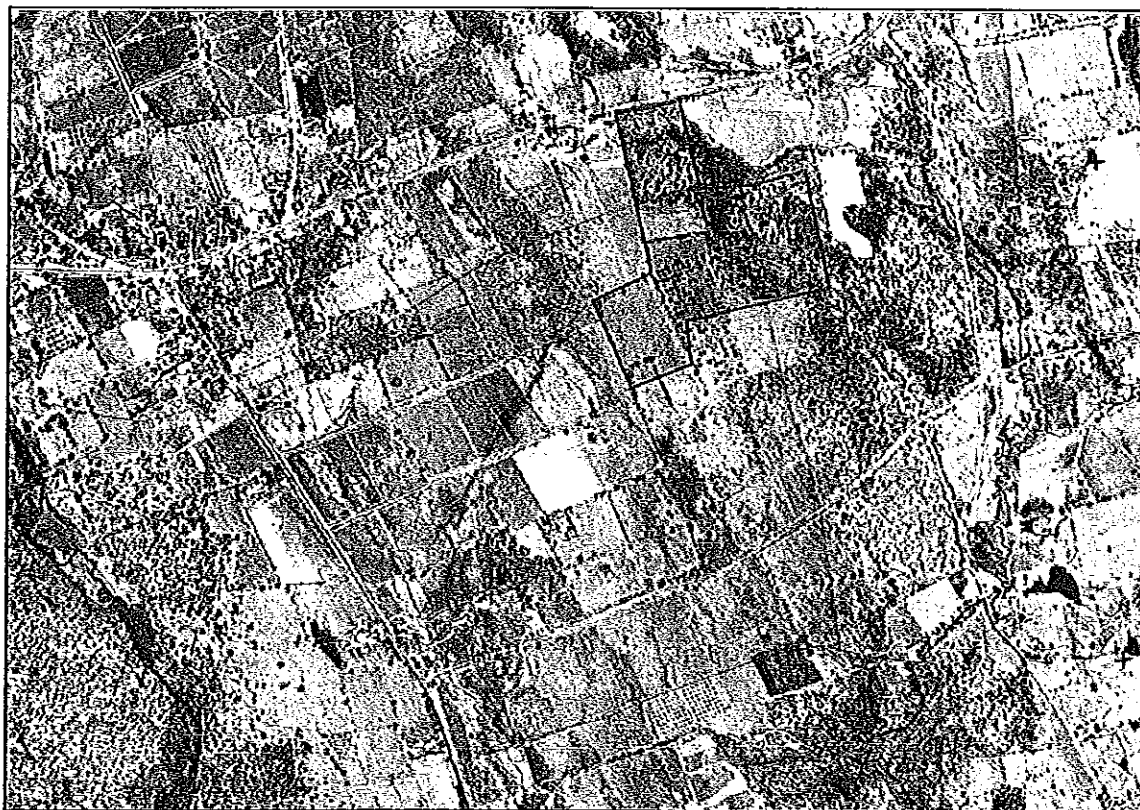


Figure 6: House at 110 Main Street (Route 66), just west of project area. Dated in the Hebron Assessor Records as ca. 1830, the house may be the house indicated on historic maps as the Peters homestead. It would appear, however, that it has been substantially altered from its 19th-century appearance.

