

Management Summary of Archaeological Investigations at the Robert G. and Cornelia S. Fitzgerald House – Pauli Murray Family Home, Durham County, North Carolina



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The Pauli Murray Project
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Introduction

From June 5 to June 13, 2017 archaeologists from the Research Labs for Archaeology (RLA) at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNCCH) conducted archaeological testing on the grounds of the Robert G. and Cornelia S. Fitzgerald House – Pauli Murray Family Home at 409 Carroll street in Durham, North Carolina. This work was prompted by plans to reconstruct the rear shed addition to the house, including an ADA accessible entrance.

Previous archaeological testing indicated that there were intact sub-surface remains in the area to the west of the rear shed addition and recommended further work (Agbe-Davies, et al. 2016). The present investigations included additional shovel testing in the area to the north of the house as well as test units which expanded on previous shovel tests west of the house. The work was completed by Anna Agbe-Davies and J. Eric Deetz of the RLA, with the assistance of UNCCH graduate student Colleen M. Betti and undergraduate Carson Massey and numerous community volunteers. Results of the investigations and the recommendations are included below.

Additional Shovel Testing

The preliminary planning for the site proposes a motor vehicle approach and ADA access on the north side of the house. Seven shovel tests were excavated in the area to the north of the house which was not included in the test survey of 2016. The soils in this area appeared to be heavily disturbed and consisted of recent clay fill. A one meter by one meter test unit (Test Unit 5) was excavated to better understand the soil layers encountered in the shovel test pits. The excavation of this test unit confirmed that the fill was very recent and contents displayed no evidence of decomposition (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Test Unit 5 which contained undecomposed brush, evidence of recent fill.

One shovel test pit was excavated within the footprint of the shed addition to examine the archaeological potential of the deposits that had been sealed under the floor of the addition. That shovel test pit indicated that there were no significant buried archaeological remains within the footprint of the old addition.

Results of Excavation West of the House

Two test units were excavated to the west of the house, Test Unit 3 west of the south end of the house and Test Unit 4, west of the north end of the house. Both of these test units uncovered intact brick work that is a result of the Fitzgerald family's attempts to mitigate the flooding issues caused by the topography of, and land use by, the cemetery to the west of the house lot.

Test Unit 3

Test Unit 3 was placed at the southwest corner of the footprint of the old rear addition. The unit encompassed three 1-meter squares. Within the unit there was evidence of a drainage ditch running north south that was open until at least the 1990s. In the east half of the unit was evidence of at least two episodes of brick work that appears to be placed to drain water away from the back of the house (Figure 2). The bricks were underfired, handmade bricks. Given the fact that the Fitzgeralds were brick makers (Anderson 2011:133-134), it is likely that this brick work is contemporary with their occupation of the house. Later occupants would not necessarily have had access to such bricks unsuitable for building or sale.



Figure 2. Brickwork in Test Unit 3. facing east.

Test Unit 4

Test Unit 4 measured 1 x 2.5 meters (Figure 3). The upper levels of this test unit uncovered a midden of household refuse that appears to be from the first half of the twentieth century, which includes the period of significance. This midden or sheet refuse extends another five meters to the north (based on shovel test evidence) but no farther into the north yard. In addition, as in Test Unit 3, there was evidence of at least two episodes of dry laid bricks placed to facilitate drainage away from the west side of the house. Unlike in Test Unit 3, in Test Unit 4 the drainage ditch appeared to have been filled at an early date and was not open in the latter part of the twentieth century. Therefore, the fill of the ditch likely dates to the period of Murray's residence.



Figure 3. Test Unit 4 facing east showing the brick work with the drainage ditch at the bottom of the photo.

Recommendations

Archaeological testing to the south and west of the Fitzgerald house revealed intact subsurface features associated with the period of significance. These features should be considered contributing elements to the historic significance of the site.

The domestic refuse scatter or midden identified in Test Unit 4 dates to the late nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century and falls within the period of significance. While the material cannot be definitively attributed to Pauli Murray, analysis of the artifacts from this midden would provide additional information about the everyday life of the household during her residence.

The brick drainage features west of the corners of the rear shed addition that were identified in Test Units 3 and 4 relate directly to the ongoing struggles that the Fitzgeralds had with water flowing through the property caused, or at least exacerbated by, the landscaping of the neighboring cemetery. These issues were significant enough to be immortalized in Murray's family history *Proud Shoes* (Murray 1999) and represent some of the many social justice issues faced by the family.

In addition to these areas with great archaeological significance, the testing also indicates there are areas with no archaeological constraints. These include the area within the footprint of the old addition and the disturbed areas north of the house (Figure 4).

If the proposed construction to restore the addition to the back of the house (Figure 5) takes place entirely within the footprint of the old addition, then no significant intact archaeological remains will be affected. Given the presence of intact archaeological features very close by, however, it is recommended that any excavation along the perimeter of the addition's footprint be done by hand. At distances farther than 5 meters northward, construction may proceed without fear of damaging significant archaeological materials.

In summary, the areas to the west of the proposed addition and to the south of the house do contain intact archaeological remains (Figure 6). These features all relate to the attempts at managing the runoff from the cemetery. The purpose of the long-range plans for the Fitzgerald house are not to develop an historic house museum as much as a space to reflect on and continue the works of Pauli Murray, however the intact brick drainage features in particular represent an opportunity for a tangible interpretive link between the history of the site and the proposed modern use. These physical remains beyond the house could aid in placing the site and the Fitzgerald's experience in historical context.

Any soil disturbance to the west and south of the house and addition could have an adverse effect on these archaeological remains, therefore, any excavation or construction outside of the footprint of the original addition should be designed in a way to minimize damage to these features.

If the construction cannot be completed within the above parameters, then it would be recommended that a Phase III archaeological data recovery project be undertaken to preserve the data that would be potentially lost.

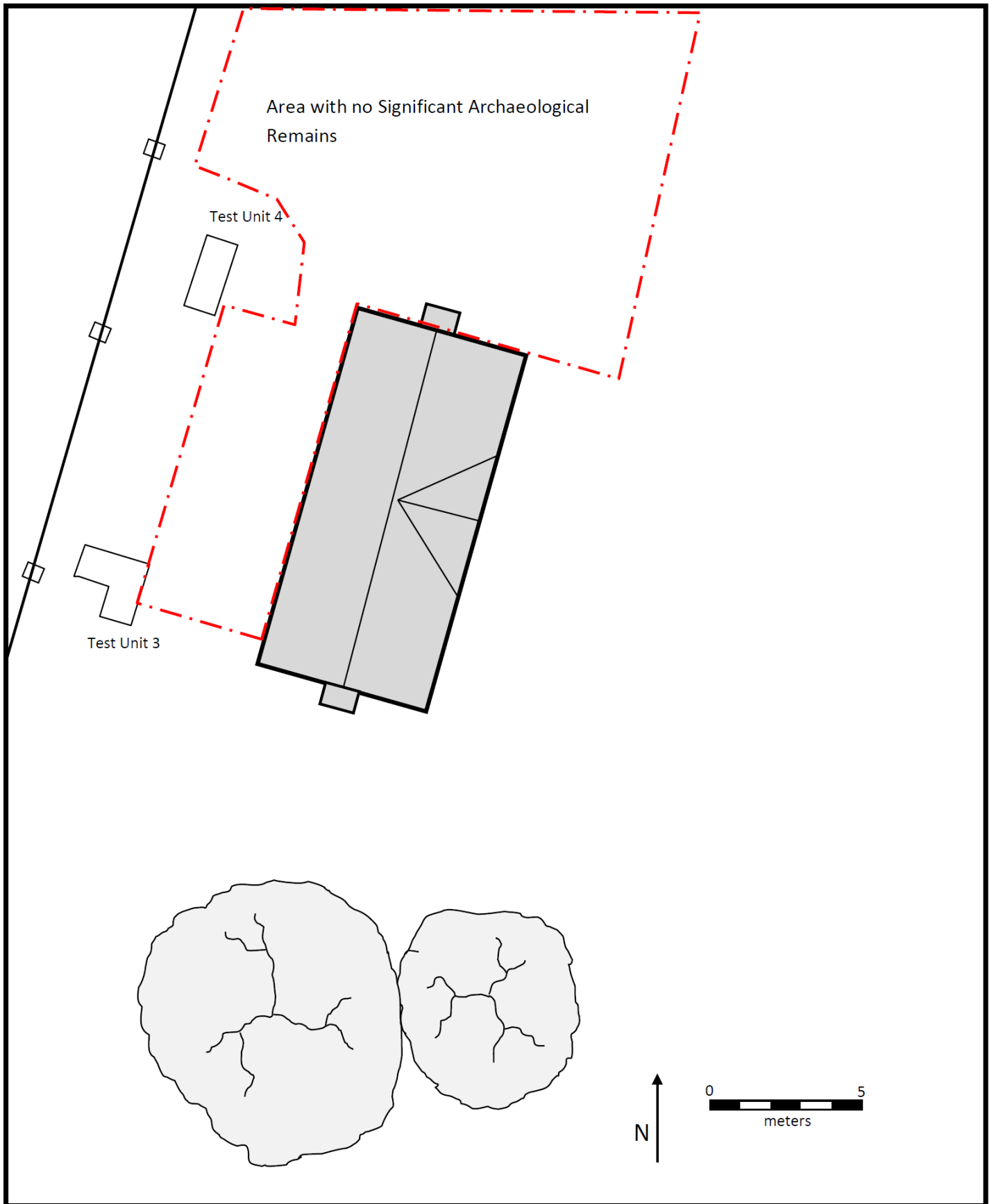


Figure 4. Area with no constraints from archaeological remains.

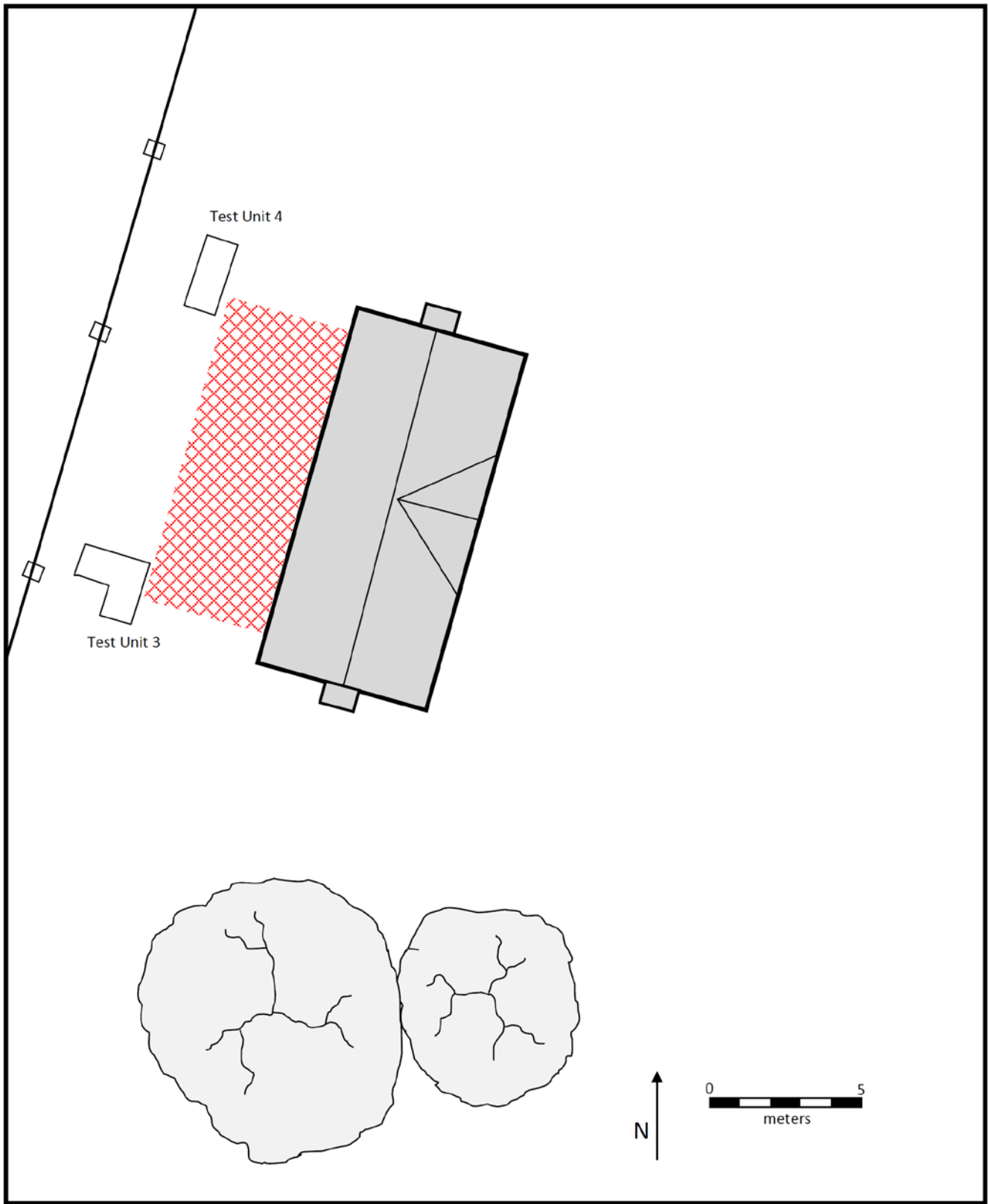


Figure 5. Approximate footprint of the old addition.

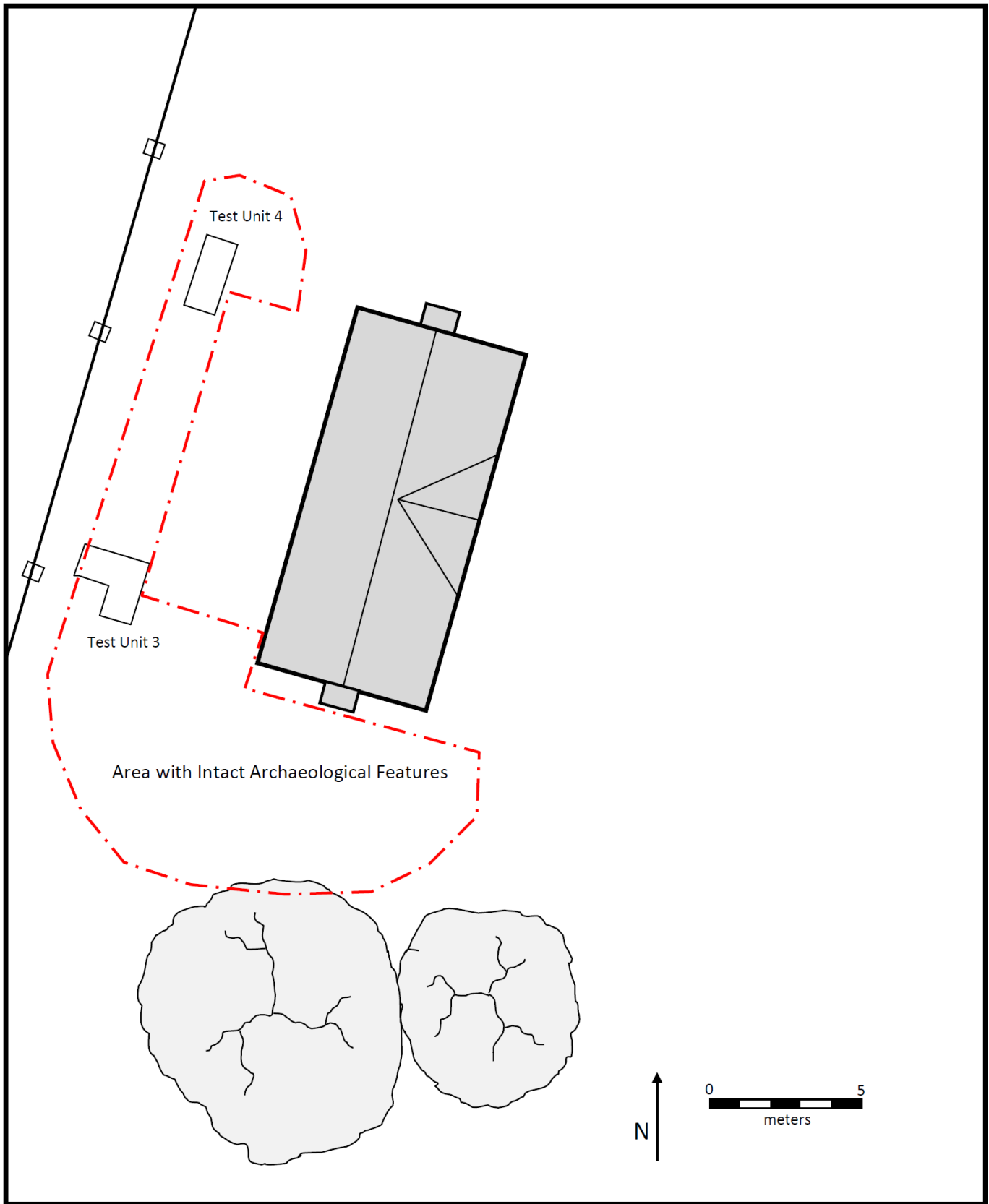


Figure 6. Areas north and west of the house where there are intact archaeological features.

References Cited

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