

NJS Presents***Museums, Archives, Artifacts, and Documents*****In This Issue:*****Investigating the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield***

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v9i2.337>

This article explores ongoing efforts to investigate the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield—the last major military confrontations in New Jersey during the Revolutionary War—in advance of the 250th anniversary of the American War for Independence.

Avid readers of *NJ Studies* may recall a Research Note from the Winter 2023 issue introducing an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students from Kean and Monmouth Universities who have embarked on a project to investigate the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield—the last major military confrontations in New Jersey during the Revolutionary War—in advance of the 250th anniversary of the American War for Independence. This research is supported by a grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission. The team is investigating the conflict holistically, employing documentary, cartographic, and archaeological techniques in order to better understand this significant but understudied campaign. We plan to share the results of our research with the widest possible public audience to make these scholarly investigations relevant to the current population of the region and beyond—so in addition to academic publications, we hope to create pop-up exhibits, public presentations, accessible physical signage, a website, and more.

This multiyear project began with an assessment of the existing secondary-source literature, focusing on (re)interpreting the battle through the lens of “new” military history. We

next moved into cartographic and historical investigations, searching far and wide for postwar damage claims, the diaries and letters of participants in and witnesses to the battles, military pension records, battlefield artifacts, and more. This archival research was primarily spearheaded by Nicole Skalenko. In this edition of *NJ Studies*, we would like to share an example of a relevant historical document, an archival map, and an artifact that help to shine new light on these understudied battles and those who witnessed them.

The Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield were the last military confrontations in New Jersey during the American Revolution. Images that come to mind when considering the Revolutionary War typically center around military figures such as General George Washington, Nathanael Greene, and Alexander Hamilton. While these men played instrumental roles in garnering our nation's independence, it is equally important to recognize that there were lesser-known individuals who played significant roles as well. A reexamination of the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield serves to shed light on the perspectives of marginalized individuals who participated in and witnessed these engagements.

The primary source materials reviewed for this study include orderly books kept by Continental and British military leaders, translations of Hessian diaries that documented the battles, 18th-century newspapers, and correspondence between Washington and his constituents. The New Jersey State Archives and the American Philosophical Society have been important resources. Both repositories contain collections rich in material attributed to the American Revolution, particularly their vast collections of microfilm that capture thousands of manuscripts, including orderly books that span the course of the war and transcriptions of Hessian journals.¹

¹ Additional primary source material was reviewed at Kean University's Special Collection Research Library and Archive, the New Jersey Historical Society, and the New York Public Library. Digital collections such as the Colenda Digital Repository at the University of Pennsylvania, *The Revolutionary City: A Portal to the Nation's Founding*,

Adjutant General William S. Stryker's (1838–1900) partial transcript of a Hessian journal offers a depiction of the Battle of Springfield from the perspective of a Hessian soldier. It also offers a glimpse into the role of women's participation in the war effort.² Page 10 of Stryker's transcript notes women following a Hessian regiment. On June 5, 1780, the army under "General Lieutenant von Knyphausen was ordered to march, and leave back, all baggage, Women, and sick."³ While the exact location of where they were left behind in Staten Island is unknown, more importantly the document suggests the presence of women following the Hessian army during the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield.⁴

Women and servants are mentioned on page 14 of Stryker's transcription, this time providing further insights into the roles of marginalized individuals during the war effort. The transcription reads, on "June 13th. [1780] Our mounted Jagers started over the Bridge towards Newark - 7 o'clock in the evening to surprise the Cavalry Pickets of the enemy there, but they found it out and drove our Jagers back. N.B. It is very near impossible to surprise the enemy on any occasion, for every house is a so called advertisement post, for the farmer, or his son or servant,

Adam Matthew Digital Database American History, 1493–1945, and the digital collection of Henry Clinton's papers located at the University of Michigan Clements Library.

A note on transcriptions: The following documents have been transcribed literally and retain all spelling and punctuation of the historical actor.

² English translations of parts of Hessian Journals: Journal of Adjutant Biel of Von Lossberg Regt.; Journal of von W? of Jager Corps; Report of Lt. Gen. von Knyphausen. Chiefly Covers Battles of Monmouth, Red Bank, and Springfield.

³ Adjutant General William S. Stryker (1838–1900) Revolutionary War Manuscript Collection [Transcripts], 1776–1787, p. 10, New Jersey State Archives, Manuscript Division, Trenton, New Jersey.

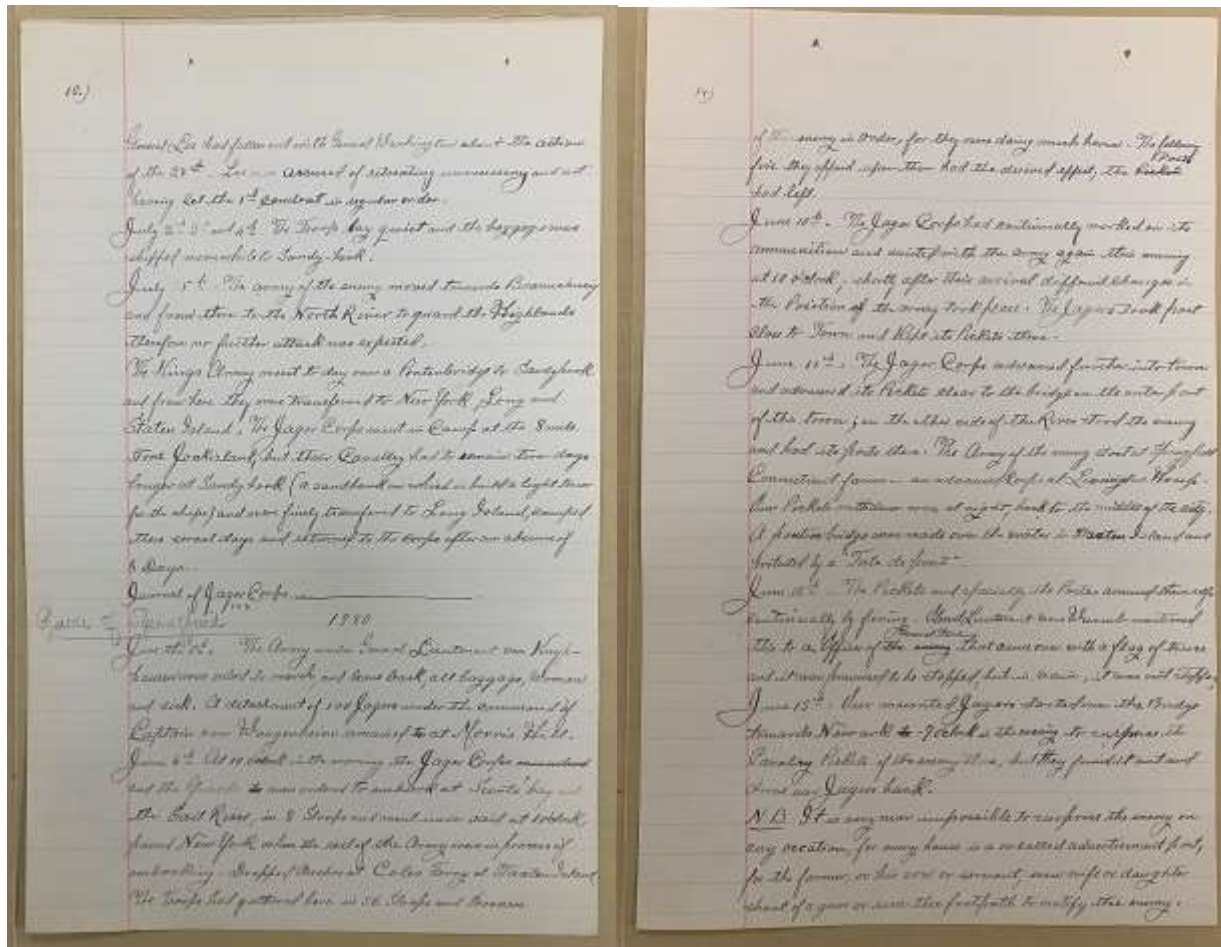
⁴ Camp followers were men, women, and children that followed the Hessian, British, and Continental Armies. Women played instrumental roles in maintaining the army through performing domestic duties and a number of them served as nurses. For a detailed example of female camp followers of the Hessian army see [Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, 11 November 1777](https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=3349&img_step=1&noalt=1&mode=dual), Massachusetts Historical Society digital collections, https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=3349&img_step=1&noalt=1&mode=dual.

even wife or daughter shoot off a gun or run the footpath to notify the enemy.”⁵ This excerpt places women and servants at the center of the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield. It also provides fascinating detail on the role of civilians during the engagements and demonstrates how they endeavored to assist the Continental Army by warning them of British and Hessian movements.

Marginalized individuals are often underrepresented in the historical record. While military figures such as George Washington and Nathanael Greene played instrumental roles during these engagements, it is equally important to recognize the roles of lesser-known figures and uncover their voices.

(scroll for image)

⁵ Adjutant General William S. Stryker (1838–1900) Revolutionary War Manuscript Collection [Transcripts], 1776–1787, p. 14, New Jersey State Archives, Manuscript Division, Trenton, New Jersey.



Adjutant General William S. Stryker (1838–1900) Revolutionary War Manuscript Collection [Transcripts], 1776–1787 p. 10 (left) and p. 14 (right). New Jersey State Archives, Manuscript Division, Trenton, New Jersey.

The second resource discussed here is a map, one of many historical maps examined during the course of this investigation. It depicts the road between Springfield and Connecticut Farms that terminates in “Elizabethtown” (modern-day Elizabeth). The map was drawn by Robert Erskine, Surveyor General of the Continental Army in 1779. This road follows what is now Morris Avenue in Springfield and a series of local roads in “Connecticut Farms” (modern-day Union) that approximate the paths of what are now Chestnut Street and Colonial Avenue. Numerous houses are shown. The road is reported as being used by advancing British and Hessian troops where they were met by defensive positions of the Continental Army on opposite sides of two Rahway River

tributaries running through Springfield.⁶ This area is now preserved as Larchmont Reservation to the east and the intersection of Mountain Avenue and Morris Avenue to the west. These two crossings of the Rahway River may be the focal points of future archaeological investigations designed to recover artifacts relating to the conflict.⁷

The map was “georeferenced” (i.e., tied to modern-day locations) by comparing the paths of roads and their river crossings as depicted on a 19th century map⁸ and an interpretative map of the progression of battles.⁹ These later two maps show similar configurations of roads and river crossings that correspond to what is shown in the contemporaneous Erskine map. To give Erskine’s map scale, two notable features at either end of the road depicted were used to fix the map to modern-day locations and give the map geographic coordinates (see the map following this paragraph). These two locations are either depicted on the historic maps or still exist today. The first is a landmark depicted on the historic maps known as “Bryant’s Tavern.” It is located in the vicinity of what today is Briant Park near the crossroads of Interstate 78 and New Jersey Route 24. The tavern is depicted in the historic maps as sitting at the passage between two hills that now are on either side of New Jersey 24. The tavern is also depicted on the historic maps as being located where two roads meet and lead eastward to Springfield. To the west, the historic maps indicate that these two roads follow the paths of New Jersey 24 and Springfield Avenue in the directions of Morristown and Pluckemin, respectively. For these reasons, we are confident that the historic reference to “Bryant’s Tavern” is near where Springfield Avenue converges with New Jersey 24,

⁶ Fleming, *The Forgotten Victory*, 240-241.

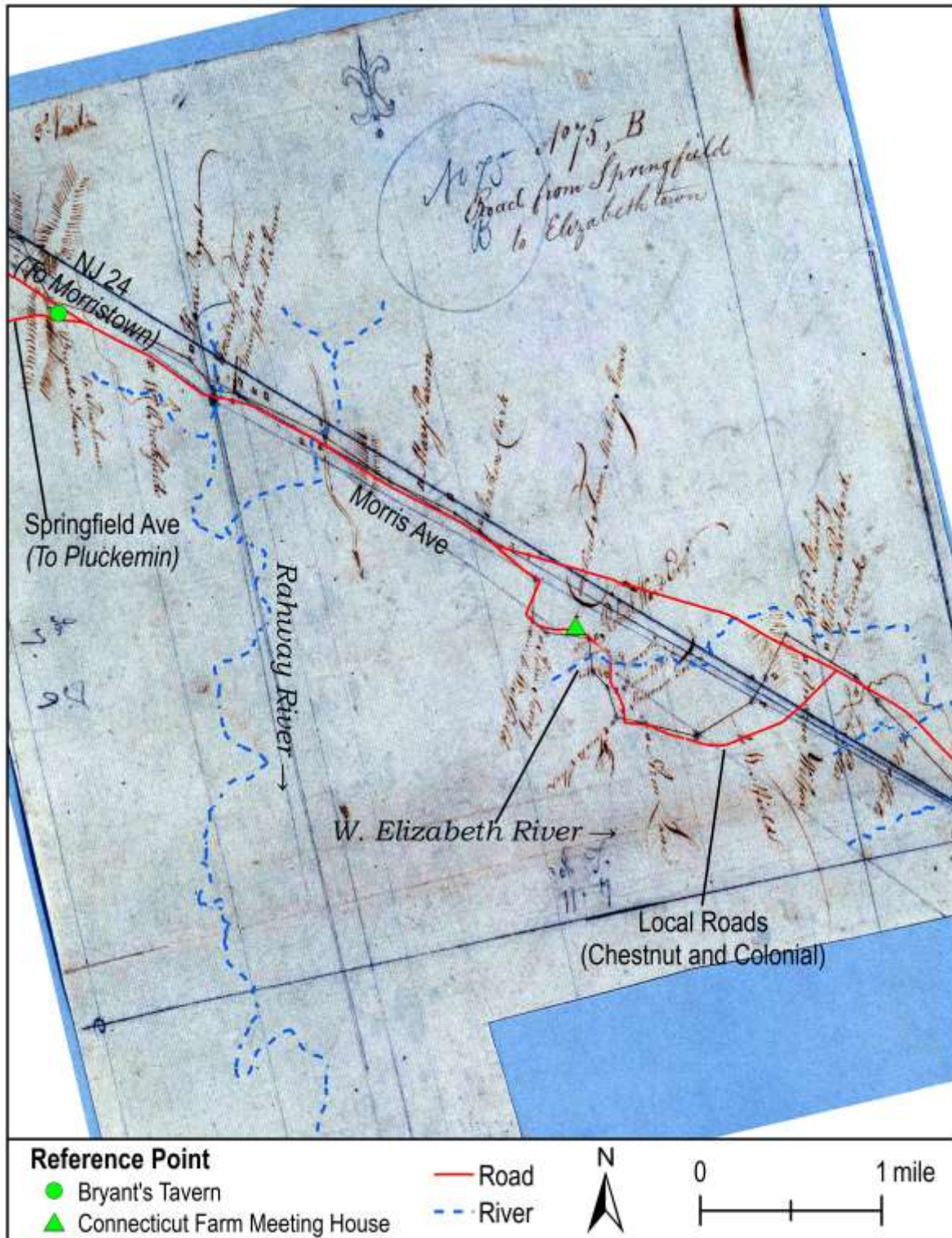
⁷ Thomas Fleming, *The Forgotten Victory: The Battle for New Jersey - 1780* (New York: Reader’s Digest Press, 1973), 240–241. The map is graciously supplied by the publicly available digital collections of the New-York Historical Society at <https://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/nyhs%3A243329>.

⁸ Ernest L. Meyer, *Topographical map of Union County, New Jersey* [map], 1862, Library of Congress Online Catalog, accessed May 24, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012593682>.

⁹ Fleming, *The Forgotten Victory*, 240–241. Maps such as this one were gathered and digitized with the help of a Monmouth University anthropology graduate student named Matthew Kraemer.

and we used this location as our first reference point for georeferencing the Erskine map. This reference point is at the location where modern-day Morris Avenue exits New Jersey 24 in the direction of Springfield and follows the path of the road depicted in historic maps, traveling through Springfield to Connecticut Farms where our next reference point is located.

(scroll for map)



Georeferenced Erskine map showing reference points (green dot and triangle) used in georeferencing the map, current roads (red lines) that generally follow the roads depicted in the historic map, and rivers (dotted blue lines) that follow the flow paths (arrows) illustrated in the historic map.

The second reference point uses what is noted as the “Connecticut Farm Meeting House” in the Erskine map. We assume this to be Connecticut Farms Presbyterian Church or a site close to what was the small geographic footprint of Connecticut Farms at the time. Evidence for this is further backed up by the configuration of roads at the time that follow what are now the local roads of Chestnut Street and Colonial Avenue in Union. What is more revealing are references to roads traveling to Westfield and Newark and also river crossings that indicate a shift in drainage from the Rahway River watershed to that of the Elizabeth River watershed. Roads exiting historic Connecticut Farms and present-day Union, near Connecticut Farms Presbyterian Church, lead toward Westfield to the southwest both presently and on the historic maps.¹⁰ A similar line of evidence can be drawn from roads exiting the east side of historic Connecticut Farms toward Newark,¹¹ a pattern that still occurs today where Colonial Avenue distributes traffic to local roads heading toward Newark. Both references to roads traveling to Westfield and Newark at the locations described are in the Erskine map to the west of the “Connecticut Farm Meeting House” in the direction of Westfield and to the east of the meeting house in the direction of Newark. The road configurations in the Erskine map around the meeting house are similar to that shown historically in the 19th century and what currently exists in our local, more historically relevant road patterns. It is interesting to note that we travel on paths of least resistance, and that in this case our local roads follow similar patterns as those charted since the 18th century. This is a compelling thought in the reconstruction of military history for the American Revolutionary War and more broadly.

To end on what might be the most compelling evidence, we discover that the Erskine map makes note of drainage patterns that distinguish the Rahway River watershed where historic

¹⁰ Meyer, *Topographical map of Union County, New Jersey* [map].

¹¹ Ibid.

Springfield is located and the Elizabeth River watershed that drains to the east in historic Connecticut Farms where Union is now located. In the Erskine map, the tributaries crossing the road near Bryant's Tavern in historic Springfield flow to the left of the road (south) as indicated by arrows at the ends of the tributary lines. In Connecticut Farms, however, the direction of these arrows shift to the right of the road (east), which is the direction that the West Branch Elizabeth River exits this part of Connecticut Farms (Union). We further our claim here that the "Connecticut Farm Meeting House" is Connecticut Farms Presbyterian Church (or at least in close proximity to it), because the meeting house is pictured next to the eastward flowing river in the Erskine map and the current location of the church is similarly located next to the West Branch Elizabeth River. Because we reference notations in the Erskine map that may be difficult to read on the page here, we supply an interactive version of the georeferenced map in which you can zoom in and out to inspect all the various details of the map referenced here:

<https://monmouth.maps.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=4ee7230f9ea541429af1bd079197d94c>.

For even further inspection in a geographic information system, the georeferenced Erskine map accompanies this article as a digital data download, here:

https://bluehawk.monmouth.edu/~gfouad/Erskine_1779_NYHS.zip.

The georeferenced Erskine map provides us the opportunity to compare locations on the historic map to that of modern-day locations. The historic areas of Springfield and Connecticut Farms are ones of intense development. This is not only impactful to the immediate location of sites but also to sites at a distance to immediate development in the path of infrastructure and stormwater management areas subject to the impacts of erosion and flooding (for example, see Larchmont Reservation at the Rahway River in Springfield). We do however now have the ability

to locate those parts of the Erskine map that reference a historic location and compare that location to the patterns of modern-day development in the pursuit of locating archaeologically viable sites. Such sites will not be referenced here as this is an ongoing archaeological investigation, but they would hypothetically be locations where there are little signs of development both presently and in historic aerial imagery collected for the area since the 1930s.¹²

Although we hope to archaeologically investigate sites associated with the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield in the future, material traces of these engagements remain on the landscape, both aboveground and below. Since the 19th century, and accelerating during the 20th century, individuals farming, gardening, and building houses have recovered artifacts from the battles. These include musket balls, cannonballs, and other military accouterments. Standing structures, such as the Cannonball House in Springfield, provide physical reminders of the damage inflicted on these small farming communities. The carnage of the conflict is also commemorated. Although no battlefield burials have been identified to date, local colonial burial grounds hold the remains of numerous soldiers whose lives were lost during the battles. A handful of original 18th-century grave markers also survive, commemorating the combatants.

One interesting grave marker is for Moses Ogden. Ogden was the scion of a distinguished family who served as an Ensign, or Second Lieutenant, in Colonel Oliver Spencer's Fourth New Jersey Regiment and was involved in some of the initial fighting around Elizabethtown. He was killed on June 7 at Connecticut Farms.¹³ His gravestone, located in the churchyard of Elizabethtown Presbyterian Church, is carved from brown sandstone in the style of Ebenezer Price,

¹² For imagery, see "Imagery," NJ Geographic Information Network, <https://njgin.nj.gov/njgin/edata/imagery/index.html>.

¹³ Fleming, 155.

an Elizabethtown carver (active from the 1750s until 1788).¹⁴ It is unusual in that the typical grim cherub is topped by crossed swords. Similarly, swords flank the inscription, which describes young Moses as a lovely youth. Even more striking, the inscription begins, “In Memory of Moses Ogden, Who Was Kill’d at Connecticut Farms.” Ogden’s well-carved marker has survived the vicissitudes of two and a half centuries of exposure to wind and weather. His marker is important not simply for what it tells us of the Ogden family’s loss but also because it serves as a material reminder of the numerous dead and wounded on both sides of the conflict during the battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield. Moreover, it provides a hint of the hidden history of the American Revolution still archaeologically present in suburban Union County.

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¹⁴ Richard Veit, *New Jersey Cemeteries and Tombstones: History in the Landscape* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 48–51.



The gravestone of Moses Ogden, likely carved by Ebenezer Price or one of his apprentices. Its epitaph reads: "This lovely Youth, Adorn'd with Truth, a brave Commander shone: His soul emerging from its Dust, With his Progenitors we trust, Shall shine in Realms unknown." Courtesy Dr. Richard Veit.

We do now have a path forward for deriving archaeological knowledge of the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield from the Erskine map and other similar maps from the time and will report such findings in work to come.

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