

## **BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

### **GENERAL HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

With reference to the Delaware State Historic Preservation Plan and the historic context framework set forth in the plan, the Kenton, Colledge, and Walker roads improvement project area in Kent County is situated within the Upper Peninsula Zone. European settlement of the Kent County area commenced in about 1671. Although exploration of the area had apparently been proceeding since early in the seventeenth century, the relatively small number of Swedish, Dutch, and English settlers who arrived in the present-day state of Delaware prior to 1671 had concentrated at either the northern or the southern end of the present state, along the coast. The region was under Swedish rule from 1638 to 1655, Dutch rule from 1655 to 1664, English rule from 1664 to 1673, Dutch rule again in 1673-1674, and was finally subjected to lasting English sovereignty in 1674 (Hancock 1976:4).

Based on the record of land grants from the 1670s, the pioneers of the Kent County area clustered to some degree along the St. Jones and Mispillion creeks during the first decade of European occupation, but thinly scattered homesteads were established along the lower reaches of most of the creeks in the area (Hancock 1976:5). The early settlers were predominantly English, although some Dutch colonists were present, and a few people of French Protestant (or Huguenot) heritage. Many settlers moved to the Kent County area from Maryland (Hancock 1976:4-6). A few Marylanders probably brought African American slaves along with them, and some slaves were imported to Kent County later on, but slavery never became the presence in the Kent County area that it did in the Chesapeake tidewater region (Hancock 1976:25).

Kent County was founded in 1680 under the name St. Jones County, and was given its permanent name by William Penn in 1682. The area had been governed as the upper reaches of the district of Whorekill (an earlier name for Lewes) since 1673. The town of Dover was founded as the permanent county seat of Kent County in 1717. Dover grew slowly in its early decades. Its population was said to consist of only 20 families in 1750 (Hancock 1976:9). This slow growth was representative of a pronounced lack of urbanization that characterized Kent County overall during the colonial period. Dover, which became Delaware's capital in 1777, has always been the preeminent town in the county (Hancock 1976:71).

The economic life of Kent County has historically been thoroughly dominated by agriculture, from the early period of European settlement almost to the present. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, following an initial phase of subsistence production while the homestead was started and the first fields were cleared, a farmer tended to take up the mixed agricultural system that characterized much of the Mid-Atlantic region. This system emphasized the production of wheat, Indian corn, and livestock for market, with other grains, flax, and orchard and garden crops raised for subsistence. Kent County settlers found the soil very fertile in general. Tobacco was cultivated

to some extent during the first century or so, chiefly by transplanted Marylanders (Herman et al. 1989:20, 24).

Gristmills, sawmills, and tanyards employing waterflow were established by millers and tanners at appropriate locations for the processing of grain, timber, and hides. These enterprises were joined in the late eighteenth century by merchant flour mills—more specialized gristmills run by miller entrepreneurs who bought farmers' wheat crops outright instead of taking a portion as payment. Manufacturing industry, as opposed to such refining establishments, remained largely absent from the economic landscape in Kent County until the mid-twentieth century (Hancock 1976:18, 22, 36).

The soil-depletive agricultural methods typical of the region's early farmers gradually cost Kent County much of the fertility of its originally highly productive soil. By the 1820s this tendency was threatening a local economic and demographic crisis. From 1820 to 1840 the county saw its population decline, from 20,793 to 19,872, as many young people left their home county instead of remaining there as residents (Hancock 1976:19).

The agrarian recovery of the 1840s, fostered by improved methods of husbandry, was greatly aided by the improvement in general means of transportation that characterized the region during the mid-nineteenth century. The surge in transportation capacity and speed lowered the price of fertilizer and greatly facilitated the marketing of agricultural commodities. The economic resurgence enabled Kent County to return to its former pattern of moderately paced population growth, attaining a population of 27,804 in 1860 and 32,874 in 1880. The changes in modes of agricultural organization and activity that had transpired since 1820, however, were reflected in changes in the economic composition of the population. Slavery declined as a presence, the number of slaves decreasing from 1,485 in 1800 to 203 in 1860. A local tendency toward manumission was probably one element in this trend, as during the same period the number of free African Americans in Kent County grew from 5,731 to 7,271 (Hancock 1976:19). Another element, however, may have been a tendency for young farmers emigrating from the county to take their slaves with them.

During the 1850s, with the advent of the railroad and its promise of removing to a large degree the hindrance of perishability, Kent County farmers began to expand their orchards and vegetable patches. In the years immediately following the Civil War (i.e., circa 1865-1875), the expanded peach orchards matured, and production of this fruit became a major aspect of the county's agriculture. The raising of strawberries, legumes, salad greens, and other garden vegetables for city markets also increased in scale. Cannery operations were established in the county's towns in response. It should be noted, however, that corn and wheat continued to be important Kent County commodities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hancock 1976:35-36).

The peach boom did not prove to be a lasting phenomenon in Kent County. In the 1890s a blight known as the peach yellows ruined many orchards, and over the early and mid-twentieth century peach production in Kent County steadily declined (Hancock 1976:35). The reverses suffered by growers emphasizing wheat or peaches made the final quarter of the nineteenth century another

period of transition (and economic frustration) for many of the county's farmers. The county's population size again stagnated, dipping slightly to 32,762 in 1900 from 32,874 in 1880.

Delaware experienced a growth in its African American population from 1880 to 1930. The most notable increase occurred in Wilmington and New Castle County, where industry offered the greatest economic opportunities. From 1870 to 1940, the African American population grew from about 50 thousand to over 150 thousand. Sussex County also experienced a rise in its African American population during this time, as a result of the need for agricultural labor. It grew from about 32 thousand to almost 50 thousand from 1870 to 1910, and then fell to about 42 thousand in 1920 before climbing to over 50 thousand people by 1940. Unlike the New Castle and Sussex county populations, the population of African Americans in Kent County remained stagnant during this period, probably because of a lack of industrial or agricultural opportunities that would attract more people to the area (Skelcher 1995:62-64).

One notable development in Kent County that benefited not only its African American community but the entire state was the establishment of the State College for Colored Students in Dover (now Delaware State University). The school was founded in 1892 by the Second Merrill Land Grant College Act of 1890 to provide an institution of higher learning for African Americans; Delaware College (now the University of Delaware) at that time was open only to whites (Skelcher 1995:124). The state appropriated \$8,000 to purchase a 100-acre tract two miles north of Dover owned by Nicholas Lockerman, the largest property owner in Kent County. The school was established at this site with an original enrollment of just 12 students, and had only 28 students in 1896. It grew dramatically during the early decades of the twentieth century. By 1923, the school's enrollment had climbed to 138 students, and by 1949 the number had reached 387 students. With the increase in students, more buildings were added and the number of faculty was increased (Delaware State University n.d.:1-4). Under the initial curriculum at the college, students were trained primarily in the fields of education and agricultural, and in trade professions. Most reported graduates became farmers or tradesmen (such as mechanics and electricians). In 1950 the Delaware Chancery Court decided that the educational opportunities offered at the colored college were not equal to those at Delaware College, and ended segregation in higher education in Delaware. After 1950, African Americans were admitted to Delaware College, and the name of the former African American college was changed to Delaware State University.

The years since 1939, when International Latex opened its plant outside Dover (the first export manufacturing installation in the county apart from those directly connected with agriculture), have seen a transformation of Kent County's economic life. Manufacturing and the presence of Dover Air Force Base (created in 1940) have broadened local economic activity beyond farming to related agricultural services and commercial businesses and maintenance of the state government, and consequently have drawn new residents to the county (Hancock 1976:36, 72).

## PROJECT AREA HISTORY

The Kenton, College, and Walker roads project area, a rural part of East Dover Hundred during the nineteenth century, is located less than two miles northwest of Dover. Kenton Road and College Road were constructed before 1868. Kenton Road was the main road between Dover and Kenton and was originally known as Dover-Kenton Road. College Road received its official name in 1892 when the College for Colored Students was established at its intersection with the Dupont Highway (Route 13). Settlement along these routes during the late nineteenth century was sparse and scattered, typical of rural areas, but there was no development in the project area at this time (Beers 1868).

By 1906, Walker Road was laid out, but still no development had occurred within the project area (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] 1906). A few homes were located along Walker and College roads east of the project area, and along McKee Road north of the project area (Figure 2).

Development in the project area began around 1910. According to Kent County deed records, much of the land in the project area was included within the large holdings of Euroamericans George Knight, William Hurley, and Grove Ennis, and for the most part the people who constructed the first homes in the area acquired parcels from these individuals (Kent County [KC] Deeds 1910-1920). The new residents were largely of African American descent. Census data indicate that four of the first six families who resided in the project area were either black or mulatto. Most were employed as farm laborers (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1920).

Among the early African American residents to settle in the project area was William C. Jason, the first African American president of the State College for Colored Students. Jason established a small farm at the intersection of McKee and College roads around 1912, and lived there until the 1940s. He served as president of the college from 1895 to 1923. During Jason's tenure, the administration erected many new buildings, increased the student population from 54 to 138, and increased the number of faculty by eight (Delaware State University n.d.:1-2).

Jason also helped to facilitate the development of African American communities in the area. In 1897 he persuaded the board of trustees of the college to purchase an adjacent farm tract and subdivide and sell the land as affordable lots to African Americans. The College Settlement Company was formed to carry out this initiative (Skelcher 1995:124). Another individual involved in this venture was Henry C. Conrad, an attorney in Dover, who served as the treasurer of the College Settlement Company and an incorporator of the company (Papers of William C. Jason 1897). The land that was subdivided by the company is located along College Road, east of the project area and the intersection of College Road with Route 15 (McKee Road), and just west of the college itself. Historical maps indicate that by 1930 a small residential subdivision, consisting of seven houses, was created in this area. It is probably the subdivision associated with the College Settlement Company (Figure 3).

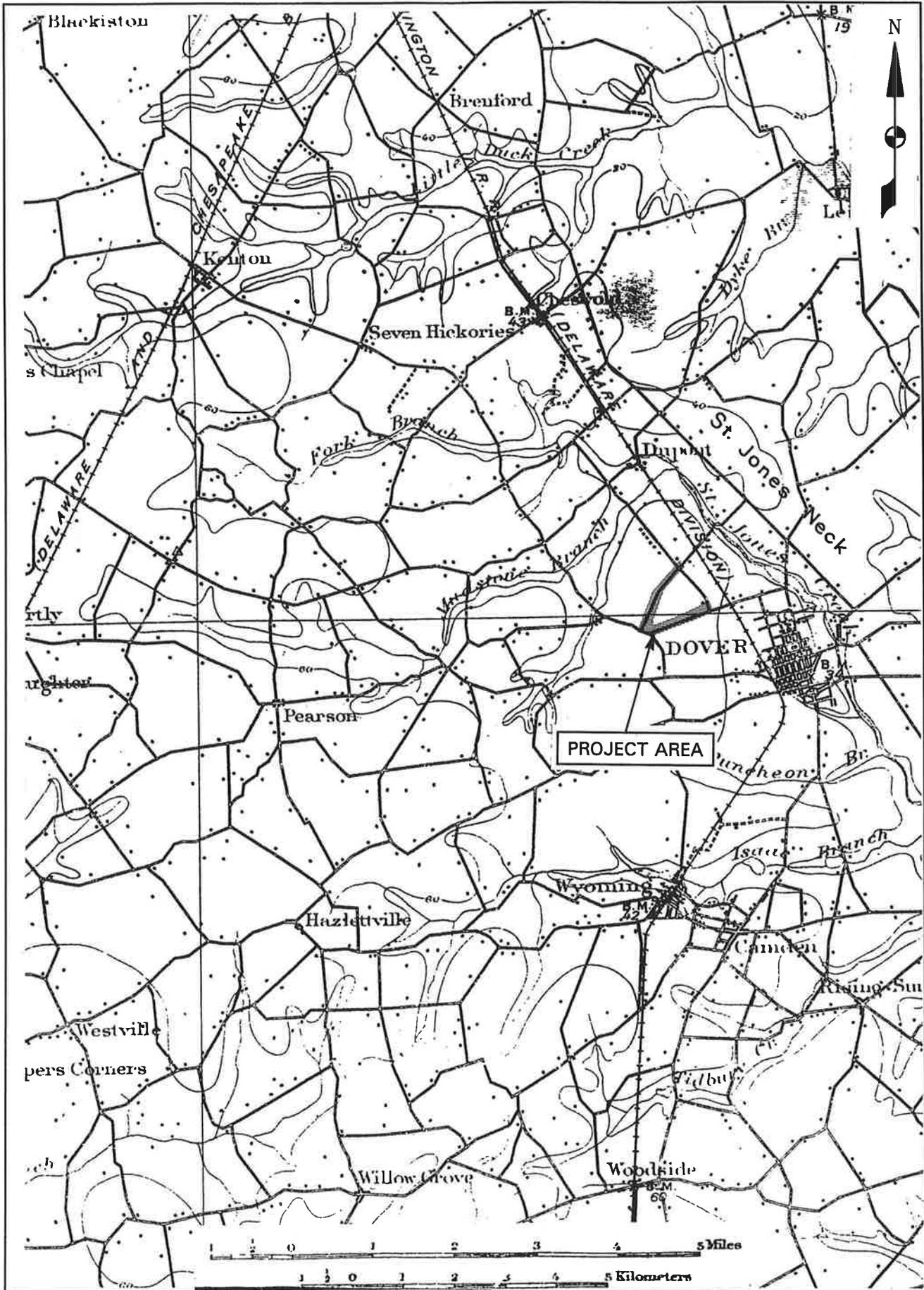


FIGURE 2: Project Area, 1906

SOURCE: USGS Quadrangle, 30 Minute Series, Dover, Del. 1906

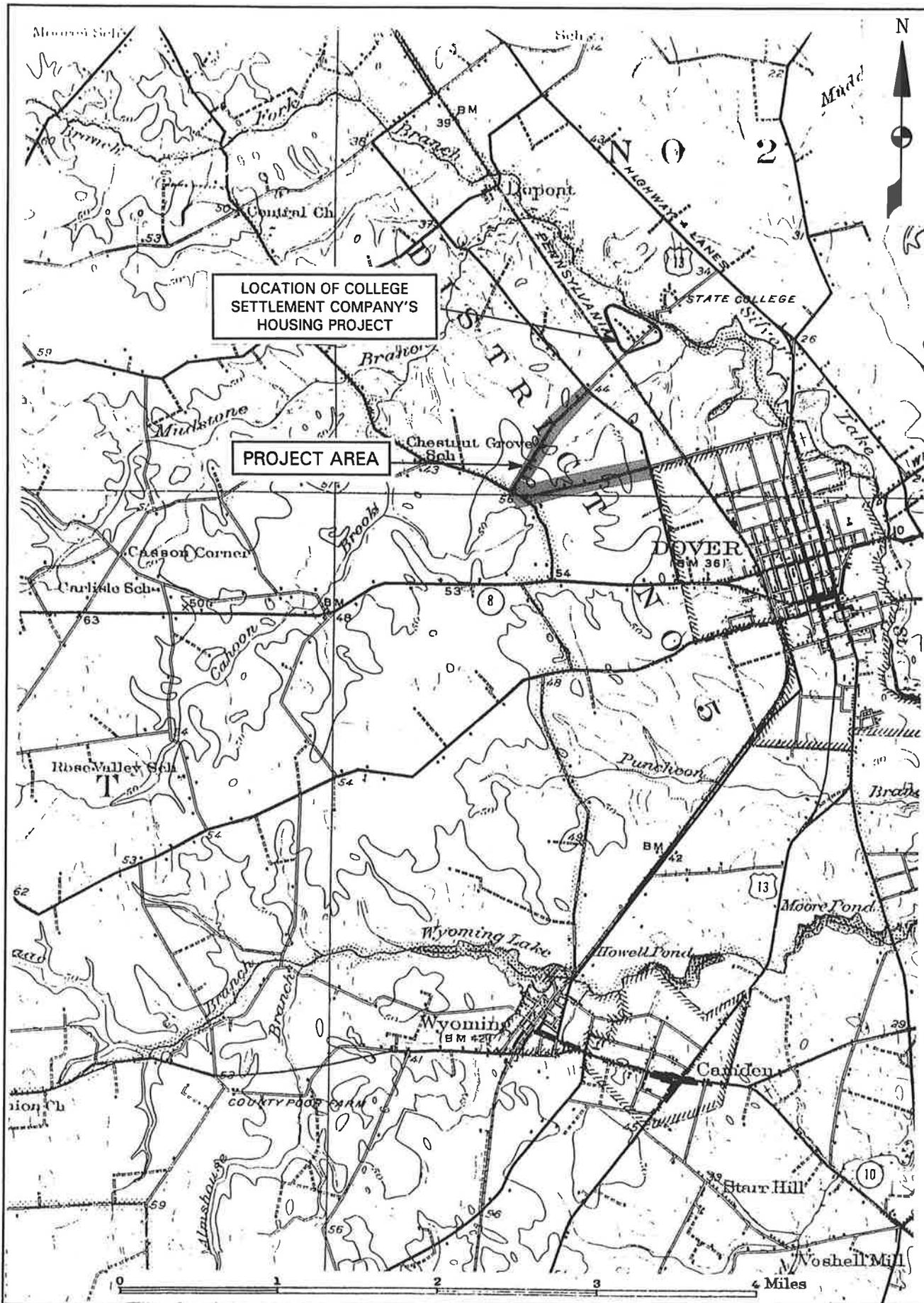


FIGURE 3: Project Area, 1930

SOURCE: USGS Quadrangle, 15 Minute Series, Wyoming, Del.-Md. Reprinted 1945

By 1930, there were 10 houses located in the project area (USGS 1930) (see Figure 3). The area remained primarily rural, with little other development until recently. Within the past 30 years, a commercial strip mall has been constructed on the northwest corner of Walker and McKee roads and three modern residential developments have been constructed along College Road and Walker Road within the project area. Post-1950 development has also occurred along College Road between the project area and the dwellings associated with the College Settlement Company's subdivision, many of which are still extant.

## **THE DELAWARE COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN**

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* defines four geographic zones for the state of Delaware, identifying important themes and property types likely to be found in each zone. The project area, situated in East Dover Hundred, is located in the Upper Peninsula Zone.

Previous research near Dover, in the vicinity of the project area, has included an assessment of architectural resources along Denneys and McKee roads (Griffitts 1997) and a cultural resource report on a McKee Road community (Heite and Blume 1995). Based on the content of these reports and inventory data from the State Historic Preservation Office, it was expected that extant architectural resources 50 years old or older present in the project area would date to the contextual periods of Industrialization and Early Urbanization 1830-1880± and Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940±. The themes most applicable for these resources would most probably be Agriculture; Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts; and Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change, all concerning minority groups in particular.

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* states that during the period of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940±, the architectural character of the previous period (Industrialization and Early Urbanization 1830-1880±) continued to pervade in the rural areas of the Upper Peninsula Zone. However, the beginnings of suburban development, the loss of agricultural lands, and transportation improvements emerged as factors which brought increasing change to rural environments, particularly those near population centers and major roads. The architectural integrity of historic resources identified for the Industrialization and Early Urbanization period, in particular, should be critically evaluated because it is for this period that the least amount of comprehensive cultural resource survey documentation is available (Herman et al. 1989:34-35).

## **HISTORIC CONTEXTS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE PROJECT AREA**

### *Agriculture*

Agriculture was a dominant aspect of the economy in Kent County from the settlement of the area to the early twentieth century. During the seventeenth and the first part of the eighteenth century, a system of subsistence agriculture, which included the cultivation of wheat, Indian corn, flax, and orchard and garden crops, was most prevalent. Participation in the beginning of commercialized agriculture characterized the rural economic activity of much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries. The development of the railroads during the mid-nineteenth century opened up distant markets to Kent County agricultural goods and encouraged the development of a commercial agricultural economy. Many farmers expanded their orchards and vegetable fields to take advantage of the new market opportunities. Even merchants invested capital to acquire large agricultural tracts, which were farmed by tenant farmers and laborers.

Among the buildings potentially associated with historic farm sites are barns, corncribs, chicken houses, granaries, smoke/meat houses, springhouses, carriage houses, stables, and milkhouses (Bedell et al. 1998:16).

### **Property Types Within the Project Area: Rural Farm Site**

#### *Architecture*

Much of American architecture dating from 1830 to 1880 was characterized by romantic styling. The Greek Revival style was the dominant form from 1830 to 1860, Italianate forms were popular from 1850 to 1880, and Gothic Revival was a popular style from 1840 to 1880. Andrew Jackson Downing's *Cottage Residences*, initially published in 1842, was the first pattern book of house styles to contain drawings of some of the new romantic styles of this time. For rural areas, relatively plain folk-style dwellings which lacked the ornamentation of the romantic styles were popular forms of construction. Hewn-log structures and I-house forms are examples of this type (McAlester and McAlester 1992:82-83, 177).

The later part of the nineteenth century, the Late Victorian era, produced a variety of domestic architectural fashions derived from earlier historical precedents, with considerable emphasis on asymmetrical forms and elaborate surface treatments. At the "high" end of the architectural spectrum, dwellings could manifest considerable attention to stylistic ornament, while at the broader, "popular," end, expression of style might consist of no more than a token reference. The architecture of rural and semirural settings continued to be characterized by folk-style dwellings, again usually simple in form, such as an I-house, a front-gable, or a gable-front-and-wing. Many had detailing inspired by Classical Revival, Italianate, or Queen Anne styles. The primary areas for the application of this detailing were at the main entrance, porch, or cornice line (McAlester and McAlester 1992:309). Throughout the Upper Peninsula Zone, simple farmhouses were detailed in this manner.

Around the turn of the century, and with increasing speed thereafter, houses tended to become smaller, more horizontal in form, and simpler in detail, partly as a reaction to the Victorian era and partly as a result of high construction and labor costs. The Bungalow, with its straightforward use of materials, low profile, and open, multipurpose plan, came to epitomize the dwelling of choice for families of relatively modest means. Colonial Revival architecture also became a dominant domestic building type during this time, appealing to families of various income levels. The style appeared in many different forms—in one or two stories, with side-gabled, hipped, and gambrel roofs. The main feature of the style was a centrally located main entrance that was accented in some way. More

lavish examples usually included highly detailed ornament around the cornice, windows, and front entrance, while simpler examples were more vernacular in detail, and had little, if any, ornament. During the early twentieth century, the proliferation of the automobile and the great improvements in roads made possible the clear geographic separation of home and workplace, resulting in the construction of residences in areas heretofore almost entirely agricultural. This process, which accelerated during the 1920s, was brought to a halt by the economic depression of the period and World War II, only to resume on an ever larger scale in the late 1940s and 1950s.

From the late 1940s onward, a number of small, exclusively residential properties were developed in the project area, reflecting the effects of postwar housing demands and the geographical freedom offered by the automobile. Rather typically in that period of high labor costs, these dwellings exhibited economies of floor space and of exterior detail. Such houses, termed "Minimal-Traditional" by McAlester and McAlester (1992:477), constituted, in effect, extremely stripped-down versions of Eclectic Revival styles prevalent in previous decades, particularly the "Georgian" or Classical Revival, "Cape," and "Tudor." The Garrison Colonial dwellings emerged during this era as a subtype of the Colonial Revival style which featured a cantilevered second story. These small house forms were in turn largely supplanted by even more stripped down versions of the Ranch and Split Level styles by the end of the 1960s (McAlester and McAlester 1992:338, 481).

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s brought ranch-style housing, subdivisions, and increased densities of residential development, particularly along Walker and College roads. In effect, the development that occurred in the project area can be viewed as a microcosm of the development that took place throughout the county during the twentieth century.

**Property Types Within the Project Area:** Craftsman/Bungalow property type; two-story Hall House property type; Front-gable dwelling property type; Garrison Colonial property type.

#### *Demographic Changes (African American Settlement Patterns in the Upper Peninsula Zone)*

The period from 1880-1940 for African American Settlement Patterns in the Upper Peninsula Zone is known as the "The Great Migration North." During the late nineteenth century, the ex-Confederate southern states began passing "Jim Crow Laws" that ushered in the period of legalized segregation in the United States. Based upon court decisions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896*, states were given the legal right to enact legislation that segregated their African American population from the population of Euroamericans and Americans of other derivation, as long as these separate institutions were "separate but equal." Most African American institutions, most notably schools, were in truth not equal in quality to their Euroamerican counterparts. Because of such derogation, many African Americans began leaving the South for the North, which had an expanding industrial base that offered employment opportunities.

Kent County was a focal point of African American settlement during this period, despite the fact that it did not experience the same growth in its African American population as did New Castle and Sussex counties. During the early twentieth century, African Americans living in Dover were

concentrated on Kirkwood and Queen streets. Most African Americans lived in the areas surrounding Dover and worked as tenant farmers and farm laborers. Many of these people settled just outside Dover, at Eden and Pideon, and along North and Water streets to South Governors Avenue. Other African Americans settled north and west of the city, along Salisbury Road and College Road, extending to Kenton Road (Skelcher 1995:104, 127). Other rural parts of Kent County also experienced a growth of African American communities as settlement occurred in Houston, Harrington, Clayton, and Kenton.

Wherever they became established, these African American communities experienced the same types of racism and segregation that were common to the southern experience in this era. In 1897, Delaware adopted a new constitution that legalized segregation. In Dover and other cities, portions of the cities became known as "Negro" sections. African Americans had to form their own churches and other community institutions to satisfy their communal needs, and schools were provided solely on a segregated basis (Skelcher 1995:115). One of the most significant developments to come out of segregation in Delaware was the formation of the State College for Colored Students (now Delaware State University) in Dover. The college was located at the juncture of Route 13 and College Road, east of the project area.

**Property Types Within the Project Area:** Craftsman/Bungalow property type; one-story Front-and-side-gable dwelling property type.