

PREFACE

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* establishes agricultural tenancy as a historic context priority. The State Review Board for Historic Preservation concurred. with this assessment, funding the development of a historic context on the theme of agricultural tenancy in the Upper Peninsula Zone (Figure 1) between 1770 and 1900 with a matching funds grant *from* the Historic Preservation Fund *to* the Center for Historic

Architecture and Engineering, University of Delaware. Carried out between June 1990 and July 1991, the project was administered by the Delaware Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

Comprehensive discussion of agricultural landscape preservation must address the history of rural tenancy. Between 1770 and 1900, tenants occupied at least half of the farms in the Upper Peninsula Zone at any given time. *Not* only did tenancy represent an accepted and respected economic alternative, but tenants in man)' areas fared better financially than did their owner-occupant neighbors. Tenants and tenant farms reflected a cross-section of the population and landscape of the Upper Peninsula Zone. Agricultural tenancy played a major role in shaping the eighteenth-century rural landscape and in the revival of the agricultural economy of the zone in the nineteenth century. Tenancy provided one of several solutions to the restoration of the depleted and exhausted soils of the early nineteenth century and the farm labor shortages. Through lease-stipulated improvements (such as fertilizing with lime or guano, crop rotation, and ditching and draining for land reclamation), landlords saw the productivity of their land begin to return. Tenants invested their profits in livestock, particularly horses and oxen as a means of production. Production and capitalization represent two key elements in the tenancy context. While acquiring one's own land remained a priority for residents of the Upper Peninsula Zone, many found that the land they could tenant came in larger, *more* productive parcels than the land they could buy. This was particularly *true* for African-Americans. Thus, tenancy provided a form of access to limited resources. From the late eighteenth through the nineteenth century, tenancy was an accepted and usually mutually profitable method of agricultural land management for residents and landowners in the Upper Peninsula Zone. Tenancy also illustrates the competitiveness and hierarchical nature of rural life and work from the late colonial period through the nineteenth century.

Delaware histories are mostly silent on agricultural tenancy. In part, this is due to the fact that prior to the study of Delaware's 1850 manuscript agricultural census by the Delaware Rural History Project, it was not known that tenancy rates were as high as 80 percent in *some*

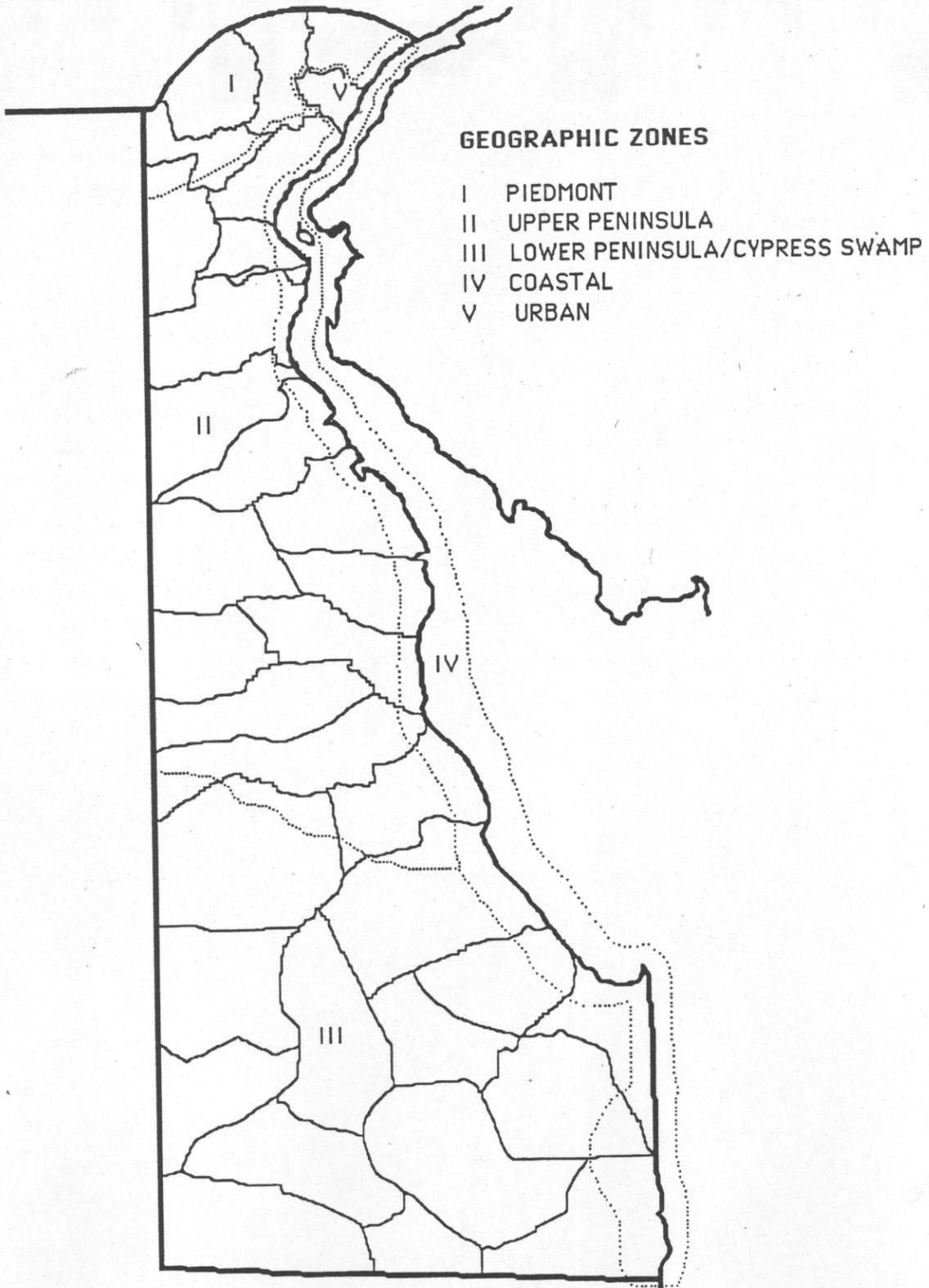


Figure 1: Geographic Zones in Delaware

Source: *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*, p. 33.

parts of the state. Recent publications indicate that the relationships between tenants and landlords were neither simple nor straight-forward, varying greatly depending upon the particular situation.² Materials from the: John Dickinson Collection, for example, describe the logistics of tenancy from the standpoint of a single non-resident landlord who owned more than 3000 acres in Kent County alone. National Register nominations such as *Dwellings of the Rural Elite in Central Delaware, 1770-1830+/-* outline the process of developing a farm for occupation by its owner and eventually turning it into a tenant property.⁴ Finally, several recent archaeological reports generated through Delaware Department of Transportation projects document sites that were occupied as tenant farms. Because tenancy was a common circumstance, comprehension of the role of tenants is crucial to understanding Delaware agriculture and the architectural resources that remain in the rural landscape today. Because of the scarcity of studies on Delaware tenancy, we grounded our study in information generated from primary source materials including tax assessments, a variety of court records, inventories and probate administration accounts, wills, insurance policies, and period newspapers. Methodologies included quantification, bibliographic search, site identification, fieldwork, and extensive documentary research. Questions addressed by the project include the nature of the architectural landscape occupied by tenants and landlords, the possibilities for economic and geographic mobility among tenants, the effect of race and gender on an

individual's potential for becoming a tenant or landlord, economic stratification of tenants and landlords, economic strategies employed by whites and blacks, and differences in the composition of black and white tenant households.

Throughout the course of the project we worked closely with the staff of the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation and an advisory group of scholars and professionals interested in agricultural tenancy in Delaware from a variety of perspectives. The advisory committee provided comments and research direction for the project and included Valerie Cesna (New Castle County Preservation Planner), Hubert Jicha (Kent County Preservation Planner), James Stewart (Chief, Delaware Bureau of Museums and Historic Sites), Madeline Thomas (Curator of Education, Delaware Bureau of Museums and Historic Sites), Wade Catts (Archaeologist, University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research), LuAnn DeCunzo (Archaeologist, University of Delaware Department of Anthropology), Steve Del Sordo (Historian, Delaware Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation), and Alice Guerrant (Archaeologist, Delaware Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation).

Project staff from the Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering included Rebecca J. Siders and Bernard L. Herman, principal investigators, and four student research assistants who participated in various aspects of the project including data entry, fieldwork, archival research, and statistical analysis--Andrea Marth, Gabrielle Lanier, Margaret Watson, and Elizabeth Bellingrath. Andrea Marth was particularly helpful in managing the administrative work related to the computer data entry, field work, and bibliographic research. Nancy Van Dolsen researched many of the legal precedents and, with Leslie Bashman, produced many of the illustrations. Susan Chase contributed much of the population census data related to African-Americans. David Ames reviewed products, participated in advisory committee meetings, authored much of the chapter on preservation planning, and provided valuable insight for the direction and focus of the project. Thanks are also extended to the many property owners who allowed access to their farms.

Methodology

Few comprehensive studies of tenancy have been completed for areas in the mid- Atlantic region. In Delaware, virtually no extensive examination of tenancy has been

attempted prior to this study. To truly understand the nature of tenancy and its effect on the agricultural landscape, the research design for this project addressed the population and

properties of three specific areas in the Upper Peninsula Zone in great detail. Most of the information has been generated from primary source materials but the project also used a variety of other sources and types of research. These included creation of quantified data bases from tax assessments for identification of statistical patterns in landholding, wealth, slaveowning, race, and gender; examination of other primary sources; development of a

selected bibliography of secondary and period sources; and examination of extant sites in the , field. Each of these elements is discussed in further detail below.

Documentary Research

One of the difficulties in undertaking a comprehensive study of tenancy is the actual identification of tenants and tenant farms. Few tenant leases survive in Delaware--those that have surfaced to date have been found in deed books, coroner's inquests, a variety of court dockets, and collections of family papers. Though these leases provide a glimpse of the relationship between tenants and landlords, they fall short of enabling us to look at tenants through an extended time period or as a coherent group within the overall population. The historic context narrative was developed from a variety of source materials: first, period documentation including tax assessments, manuscript agricultural and population censuses, probate records, legal depositions, orphans court proceedings, historic atlases, newspaper accounts, and private journals; and second, existing National Register nominations, archaeological field reports, and other secondary sources.

Tax Assessment Data Bases

Many of the nineteenth-century tax assessments for Kent County actually identified, by name, tenants who were holding particular farms, along with information about the size and type of farm land, the buildings on the farm, and the value of the property. Because each tax assessment exists as a window on tenancy, the analysis of multiple lists gives a sequence and a means to measure change over time and discover pattern on the land in the distribution of land, animals, slaves, and wealth. The tax assessment data sets were used in conjunction with those for the 1850 agricultural census, 1770-1830 orphans court valuations, and scattered local tax lists from 1795 to 1830.

Comprehensive tax assessments made throughout the state in the nineteenth century vary in detail. In some hundreds they include itemizations of individual land holdings, and describe the amount and type of acreage and its value, along with lists of livestock, slaves, and silver plate. A poll tax based on the man's ability to work or produce income completed the valuation. In general, males over the age of 16 were taxed for these items; women and minor children were assessed only for real estate, livestock, and slaves. Because they did not vote, they failed to enter the assessment records when they did not own taxable property. Males who owned land in one hundred but lived elsewhere were assessed only for the value of their real estate; their poll tax was levied in the hundred where they maintained residence.

The statistical data sets identified two different groups of descriptive information. One focused on each taxable (an individual person being taxed for real and personal property only or a combination of real and personal property and poll tax) and itemized information about livestock, slaves, number of properties owned, number of tenants, total taxable wealth, poll tax, race, and gender. The second isolated each discrete parcel of real estate for details about

amount of acreage, value of land, improved or unimproved land, distinctions between town lots and farms, name and status of the resident, and number, construction material, and condition of different types of buildings on the land. The two data bases were linked by an identification number that tied the owner of a property to specific cases in the property data base. The three hundreds chosen for the study sample were Appoquinimink (including Blackbird) in New Castle County, and Murderkill (North and South) and Little Creek (the western half of which became Kenton Hundred) in Kent County. They were selected for several reasons: 1) each represents a geographical band across the state; 2) they include the various types of farm land available in the region (some of the richest agricultural lands in the state were located in northern Appoquinimink, while the coastal sections of Little Creek contained less productive marsh land); 3) all the hundreds have comprehensive cultural resource surveys that identify properties potentially related to the tenancy context; and 4) a good selection of comprehensive tax assessments were available throughout the nineteenth century for each hundred. The years that were chosen for the three sample hundreds were:

Murderkill--1822, 1860, 1896

Little Creek--1822, 1860, 1896

Appoquinimink--1816, 1861 (a usable late nineteenth century list does not exist)

Additional assessments used for comparative analysis include: Duck Creek (1797/1804, 1822, 1852,1896), Dover (1797/1804), Pencader (1797,1804,1816), St. Georges (1816), and summaries prepared by the Bureau of Museums and Historic Sites for the Kent County 1797/1804 assessments.

The tax assessment data sets describe a variety of patterns, such as 1) differences between owner-occupied and tenant-occupied properties in terms of number of buildings, types of buildings, size and value of farms, material and condition of buildings, value per acre, value per farm, and the intensity of farming; 2) the economic mobility of tenants based on their ability to purchase land, changes in the total value of their property, changes in status from non-landowner to landowner and from tenant to landowner to landlord; 3) the geographic mobility of tenants (movement from one farm to another and from one hundred to another); 4) the differences in the economic status of tenants and landlords (decile location, percentage of capital invested in livestock and farming tools, land ownership); and 5) the question of how race and gender affected issues of tenancy.

Bibliography

A selected bibliography developed from secondary and period literature, particularly related to trends in agricultural reform, agricultural and economic history, and comparative studies of tenancy in other regions is included. Period sources included farm journals from the region, writings from agricultural magazines such as the *Memoirs of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture*, publications on preferred building types (both dwellings and agricultural outbuildings) and farm plans, newspaper advertisements, petitions and legislation, orphans court valuations, historical atlases, and period commentaries on rural life. The historic context also draws on primary documents such as various court records,

manuscript population and agricultural census, probate accounts, insurance policies, private daybooks and accounts, and county poor house records.

Farms

An additional note on our methodology regards the definition of farms. Scholars who have studied historic agriculture differ in their assessment of what constituted viable, subsistence-level farms.⁷ Lucy Simler, writing on Chester County, Pennsylvania, describes a group known as "smallholders" who held parcels of 20 acres or less, in comparison to tenants who held larger, more viable commercial farms of 60 acres or more. While some smallholders worked as farm laborers, many more found employment in the nonagricultural trades of the rural economy. Weavers, carpenters, hatters, tanners, millers, and blacksmiths represented the local craft population that depended on the larger farm economy. Still, their own agricultural labors tended to be incidental and occasional responses to the farm settings in which they lived and worked. Jack Michel, in his study of mid-nineteenth century Delaware agriculture, believes that a figure of 60 to 80 acres was more accurate in Delaware by 1850. Michel, unlike Simler, based his average on what was required for market agricultural production. Our research suggests, however, that defining a viable farm in terms of acreage belies the role period perceptions played in defining the reality of commercial agriculture practice. In the eyes of nineteenth-century residents, properties as small as 10 to 20 acres were termed farms. In this study, any discussion of farms will refer to properties of 10 acres or more. The threshold for farm designation comprised several characteristics. First, properties of less than 10 acres usually were not assigned a value per acre but were treated as a lot, whereas farms over 10 acres were assessed on their value per acre. In many cases the

tax assessment refers to these parcels of more than ten acres as "a farm of 20 acres" indicating

that the tax assessor perceived it as a farm. Second, tenants on properties of less than 10 acres rarely possessed more in the way of livestock than a cow and a few pigs, indicating that they were not involved in full-scale market farming but were keeping livestock in order to supplement the household diet and budget. Third, management of a plot as small as 20 acres could involve forms of farm management including crop rotation systems. In 1811, for example, Timothy Hanson, Iabez Jenkins, and Cornelius P. Comegys, viewed Thomas Stout's farm of 20 acres (5 acres cleared), estimated its annual rental value at \$20, and described the land as follows:

...the cleared land is enclosed with a fence not sufficient to prevent creatures from destroying the grain &C...direct that the lot should be

equally divided into two appartements, and that each may be tilled every other year...no more land ought to be cleared..

Fourth, merchants' account books show that the merchants and grain brokers of Leipsic and Little Creek Landing accepted consignments of corn and grain that were as small as 14 bushels as well as the bigger harvests of more than a hundred bushels. The wide range in marketed grain by volume implies that merchant-brokers provided ready outlets for crops from small as well as large farms. For farmers of ten to a thousand acres, the broker represented an equally accessible outlet regardless of farm size. Finally, between 1822 and 1860 in Little Creek Hundred the median size of owner-occupied farms was cut by one-quarter, dropping from 100 to 72 acres, as more people became landowners. While landownership was becoming possible for a greater number of folks, the size of their parcels was dropping drastically. Still, the decline in farm size did not signal an end to productive market agriculture. In April 1838, William Huffington wrote, "it has been reduced to a certainty, that even in our country, forty acres of land may be made to support a large family in every comfort of life.,¹⁰ The veracity of that observation, as we shall see, lay in changing farm size, agricultural intensification, and the economics of tenancy.

Field Work

Finally, the project included a field component. This work sought to identify rates of survival and geographic distribution patterns for property types. Comparison of the tenant properties listed on the 1860 tax assessment with Beers' 1868 Atlas of Delaware, USGS quad maps, and the Delaware Cultural Resource Survey Inventory identified J number of sites where tenant properties might be extant. Reconnaissance fieldwork determined if the buildings on the existing sites matched the descriptions in the tax assessments. In Little Creek and Kenton hundreds, 39 sites were tentatively identified JS tenant sites in 1860; 41 were

found in North and South Murderkill hundreds. Comprehensive identification of tenant sites in Appoquinimink and Blackbird hundreds--was unsuccessful. The results of the reconnaissance survey are summarized in Appendix A.

Preservation Planning

A set of criteria were designed to evaluate the significance of architectural resources in relationship to the historic context. These criteria differ from the criteria for evaluating eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places because they are tailored to a particular historic context and address issues such as integrity, frequency of survival, and the specific architectural and documentary features that associate the resource with the agricultural tenancy context. A treatment strategy for the historic context and property types was

developed, including goals and priorities for identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment of all property types associated with the context.

Conclusion

For the most part, the methodology was successful--only two major problems arose. The first came from underestimating the amount of time required to create the data sets. As a result, we were forced to cut back on the number of tax assessments used for statistical analysis. The second problem was related to fieldwork. While we were able to conduct reconnaissance survey review for tenant sites in Little Creek and Murderkill hundreds, the tax assessment data for Appoquinimink Hundred in 1861 did not identify tenant farms that could be matched with the 1868 Beers Atlas. Consequently, we were unable to conduct any on site field visits in Appoquinimink Hundred. All research notes, statistical data sets, and analysis materials are located at the Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering, University of Delaware.

Information Needs

One of the requirements for a fully developed historic context is the identification of information needs--areas of research that may contribute to the context but require further exploration beyond the scope of the current project. During the course of preparing our

historic context for agricultural tenancy, several promising research questions and sources came to light but could not be pursued due to constraints of time and money. They are identified here in the hope that future projects may address them and add to our understanding of agricultural tenancy.

Economic Situation in the First Quarter of the Nineteenth Century

A variety of sources indicate that events of major importance occurred in Kent County, if not the whole state, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A primary problem was the constricted flow of capital. The Kent County Court of Common Pleas

Executions records significant activity, primarily in suits for payment, indicative of tight money. Although judgements are made requiring payment of debts, payment was held up in many cases because goods seized could not be sold due to the lack of available cash. Probate records contain long lists of debts and debtors--many of whom are labeled "desperate," possibly indicating that the person's lack of resources or potential income created an unlikely situation for collection of the debt. Closer examination of Common Pleas cases (including dockets, insolvent debtors' petitions, executions, etc.) will provide valuable information regarding the economic situation in the area. The analysis of these records will yield

important data about the demographics *of* debt and the consequences *of* foreclosure for landlords and tenants. One possible consequence *of* the lack *of* capital may have been a decrease in new building projects, particularly new farm buildings.

Disease and Mortality .

Research indicates that a great number of individuals succumbed to a variety of chronic diseases (rather than accidents or specific epidemics) in Little Creek Hundred in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Raw population counts indicate that similar conditions and problems existed in other hundreds as well. Although little has been written on disease in Kent County, or the state, for that period, the records of the Delaware Medical Society (founded in 1789) and other sources such as coroners's accounts provide data on this subject. The unsettling quality of high mortality rates exerted a pronounced influence on the availability of land for prospective tenants. Many of the landowners who died, for example, left minor children. Their estates, in some cases, were administered through the Orphans Court for periods of up to twenty years. Many *of* the properties owned by these children were let out to tenants in order to generate income for the upkeep *of* the orphans. The peculiar relationship between mortality, patrimony, and tenancy remains a critical element in any study of tenant farms as a property type.

Markets for Different Crops

One set of potentially informative documents on the economics and products *of* tenancy are the records *of* railroad shipping companies. These records may reveal information regarding the types *of* crops being sent to particular markets from different locations in Delaware following the 1850s establishment of rail service the length of the state. Steamship records for the companies that worked along the Delaware River may show what crops were being sent to Philadelphia and other port markets, the seasonal it) *of* shipping, and the types and volume *of* shipped produce. Since different crops required different types of farming and farm buildings, these records ma) help determine the significance of particular building types in certain periods.

Changes in Status of Individual Tenants -

One question raised by the advisory committee was that of the possibilities for change in the economic status of tenants. Were they able to become landowners after tenancing for a period? What strategies did they employ to achieve that status? While we have addressed some of these questions, particularly in the area of investment of capital by tenants, time constraints prevented us from tracking individual tenants in a systematic way through their life cycle. One example of a successful individual is Andrew Eliason, a resident of St. Georges and Pencader hundreds in the nineteenth century. From his start as a drover on the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, Eliason spent several years as a tenant farmer before becoming a landholder and supervising the production of crops and livestock on three farms. Given the number of tax assessments in Kent County in the nineteenth century, tracing specific individuals from one tax year to another should be possible. This could provide very valuable information for the tenancy context.

Agricultural Reform Farm Implements

The early- to mid-nineteenth century was a protracted period of progressive agriculture that entailed extensive experimentation with new seed strains, crop rotations, fertilizers, and farm machinery. In our search for evidence of the effects of agricultural "reform", we realized that a review of probate inventories throughout the century could provide an excellent picture of the changing nature of farm equipment. Machinery from mechanical threshers to scythes posed certain demands on the rural labor force. The equipment to sow, cultivate, reap, thresh, and store required hands to work and managers to supervise. The relationship between landlords, farm managers, tenants, and day laborers can be advanced from the types of farm equipment and working livestock found in inventories. Identification of the types of farmers (tenants or owner-occupants) who purchased and used these new implements may provide a clearer picture of the influence of progressive agriculture on tenancy.