

4.3.10 K-02748. J.B. Tracy House/Miller's House
776 McGinnis Pond Road
SM-00-121.00-01-52.00

Description: This 19.90-acre property is located in the southeast quadrant of the intersection of Barratts Chapel Road and McGinnis Pond Road. The property contains a dwelling, garage, and storage shed. Access to the property is *via* a gravel driveway that extends past the south side of the house from McGinnis Pond Road. The property is marked by agricultural fields to the north and east, a wooded area bordering a former millstream to the south, and McGinnis Pond Road to the west.

The dwelling is a two-story, Italianate style house, which was built *ca.* 1865. The three-bay by two-bay main block of the house is configured on a nearly square plan, with a hipped asphalt shingle roof and a stucco-covered brick foundation. The house is clad in aluminum siding and features some historic narrow sash windows that are paired under simple wood entablatures. There is an addition with a rooftop deck on the south side and a hipped roof, enclosed porch addition on the east side. The additions (or possibly the replacement siding) obscure the location of the house's historic entryway. It is unclear whether the house was originally oriented to the north or west toward the local roads or to the south in the direction of the mill complex. Today there is no formal entrance and the house is accessed from the southeast corner at the rear of the driveway.

A three-bay garage from *ca.* 1960 with front-gable roof and vinyl siding is located to the south of the house. The front (west) facade has three modern overhead garage doors. The north and south elevations each have a modern steel pedestrian door. Attached to the east side of the garage is a fenced-in pet shelter that spans the width of the structure.

A front-gable shed, which dates to *ca.* 1960, stands to the south of the house and garage. It is covered in vertical board, which has been painted brown. The front (north) facade has a hinged wood door.

Applicable Historic Context(s): Upper Peninsula Zone; Early Industrialization (1770-1830±); Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880±); Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940±); Agriculture; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes; Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts; Manufacturing.

Historical Overview: The property associated with K-02748, which features a two-story Italianate house, was also the site of a mill (and later multiple mills) from the early eighteenth

century until at least the 1950s. The mill building(s) are no longer present, but features associated with the mill remain, including the milldam and millpond. The house on the property served as the miller's house for at least a portion of the period. It dates to ca. 1865.

The earliest references to a mill on this parcel are contained in J. Thomas Scharf's *History of Delaware, 1609-1888*. Scharf states that a mill was present on the property prior to 1722. In that year, Samuel Nichol's administratrix sold "Nichols Mill" and 100 acres of land to Andrew Caldwell (Scharf 1888). He did not, however, note what type of mill it was, and the conveyance could not be located at the Kent County administration building or at the Delaware Public Archives. Scharf further noted that in 1767, William Roads owned a "water gristmill" at the site (Scharf 1888).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the parcel was owned by McKimney Smack, a miller who ran a complex known as Lexington Mills (Kent County Deeds 1796). According to the 1798 tax assessments for Murderkill Hundred, Smack owned "74 acres of land, all cleared with good buildings and a good gristmill and sawmill valued at \$1,500" (Kent County Tax Assessments 1798). The types of "good buildings" located on Smack's land were not specified. Around the time of the assessment, Smack sold the land, mill, and mill apparatus to Hugh Clarke, but it all came back to Smack in 1802 (Kent County Deeds 1802). Smack held the Lexington Mill property until his death in 1814, when it was devised by will to his daughter Heatha (Kent County Wills 1814). Shortly thereafter it came into the possession of another daughter, Anne (also Ann) McKimney Smack, a minor. An Orphans Court order to value the rents of Ann Smack dated May 30, 1815, contains this description of the mill property (Kent County Orphan's Court Case Files 1815):

First upon the mill property said to contain five or six acres on which is 2 small log houses and an old cooper's shop, a grist mill with 2 pair of stones, barn 35 by 40 feet in bad order and repair and the guardian ought to do many repairs which are necessary, particularly to the brick foundation walls, the running and other gear of the mill are in sufficient repair, also a Saw Mill in good order and repair. We estimate the annual value of the said property at two hundred dollars.

Anne McKimney Smack would marry Samuel Virden prior to 1818 (Virden Family Papers 2005). Samuel Virden would formally come into possession of the Lexington Mills property in 1823. At that time, the mill seat contained "13 acres of land, more or less, whereon said Mills stand" (Kent County Deeds 1823). According to the 1822 tax assessment for Murderkill Hundred, Virden's mill property had on it a gristmill, a sawmill, and a miller's house of unspecified material and construction. Virden, like Smack before him,

lived on an adjacent farm of approximately 350 acres. He rented the sawmill and gristmill to a tenant or tenants (Sehorn 2005). During his ownership, the complex would become known as Virden Mills.

Virden retained ownership of the 13-acre mill property at the time of the 1850 Census of Manufacturers. The gristmill was rented that year by James Riggs. The second mill on the property was a bark mill manufacturing quercitron, a product of black oak bark used in tanning and dyeing (U.S. Census 1850b). There was no sawmill. The 1852 tax assessment for Murderkill Hundred provided greater detail on the property. The mills (grist and bark), mill house, and mill gates were all described as “in tolerable repair.” The gristmill was powered by a waterwheel running two sets of Burr stones. The property was valued at \$2,400 (Kent County Tax Assessments 1852).

The 1859 map of Murderkill Hundred showed the mill pond on the west side of what is today McGinnis Pond Road, and the two mill buildings on the east side of the road, just south of Mill Creek (French and Skinner 1859) (see Figure 3). The creek was also known as the Hudson Branch of Murderkill Creek. One of the buildings is labeled “G.M.” for gristmill; it is assumed the second is the bark mill. A building to the north of the creek, on the east side of the road, is labeled “S. Virden”. It approximates the location of the house associated with K-02748. Virden owned it, but did not live there. It is assumed the miller lived there.

According to the 1860 tax assessments for Murderkill Hundred, the water-powered gristmill still ran two sets of Burr stones and it remained in tolerable repair. The bark mill, however, was described as being in bad repair, and there is no mention made of a miller’s house on the property. The mills were listed as in the tenure of Virden and Wilson (no first name given) and valued at \$3,000, despite the condition of the bark mill (Kent County Tax Assessments 1860). The 1860 Census of Manufacturers for Murderkill Hundred did not provide additional information.

Virden gave up ownership of the mill property in 1864, selling the 13-acre parcel to William H. McIlvaine for \$5,000. The conveyance “of the Mills formerly known as Lexington Mills but now known and called by the name Virden Mills” included “all the lands condemned used or occupied for the dam races and pond of said Mills...it being the intention of the parties...to include in this Indenture the said Mills and Mill seat” (Kent County Deeds 1864). McIlvaine owned the property for only two years before going bankrupt. He and his wife sold the mill property in 1866 to Joseph B. Tracey. The 1866 deed for the first time specifically mentions the miller’s house as it looks today: a “frame, two-story house with a single-story attachment and outbuildings.” The deed also made clear that the mill and house were

rented. The sale was “subject to the rights of James Harrison as tenant of the Mills and dwelling house where he now resides for the present year” (Kent County Deeds 1866b). Tracey (identified as J.B. Tracy), however, was indicated as the owner of the bark mill and gristmill on the 1868 map of Murderkill Hundred (Beers 1868) (see Figure 4).

Although the 1870 Census of Manufacturers listed Joseph B. Tracey as the owner of a flour and meal mill in South Murderkill Hundred (U.S. Census 1870b), the 1872 tax assessments for the hundred made clear that James Wilson was living on the property and undoubtedly running the mill (Kent County Tax Assessments 1872). Perhaps this was the same Wilson who operated the mill during Virden’s ownership. The mill seat was now listed as 21 rather than 13 acres. The bark mill was no longer in running order. The gristmill was capitalized at \$5,000 and ground wheat flour and corn meal using two sets of Burr stones. The tax assessment stated that it was powered by two water wheels (U.S. Census 1870b; Kent County Tax Assessments 1872). This could mean that the mill was now using two turbines. It was not uncommon in the 1860s and 1870s for gristmills to switch from waterwheels to turbines, which were more efficient, took up less room, and reduced operating costs. The mill had two male employees who were paid a total of \$110 in average yearly wages (U.S. Census 1870b).

In 1879, Tracey sold the mill, mill seat, races, dam, millstream, two-story frame house with single-story addition, and outbuildings to John W. Massey, M.D. Massey’s profession signals that the mill was rented, as does the deed, which specifically stated that the mill was in the tenure of John W. Lynch (Kent County Deeds 1879). According to the 1880 Census of Manufacturers, only a gristmill remained on the property. Lynch’s mill was capitalized at \$15,000 -- quite a high investment -- and ground wheat and corn. The millpond and races provided an eight-foot fall and powered two turbine wheels (U.S. Census 1880b).

The Lynch family would have the longest recorded association with the mill property. Henry C. Lynch of Dover (it is assumed this was the same family) acquired ownership of the property in 1889 following John W. Massey’s death. Massey’s heirs sold the mill to pay off debts (Kent County Deeds 1889:372). He and his wife, Sallie B. Lynch, would own the property until 1937, a period of 48 years. Henry C. Lynch was listed in the 1900 population census as a miller and farmer living in South Murderkill Hundred (U.S. Census 1900), so the assumption is that the Lynches lived on the property. This is bolstered by deeds for the surrounding properties from this era, which referenced the Lynch Mill property in their descriptions.

In 1937, Sallie Lynch, by then a widow, sold the 20-acre property to George F. and Cora McGinnis (Kent County Deeds 1937b). The millpond and road that crosses the milldam is named for them. The mill was apparently still operating when the McGinnis's bought the parcel; it is shown on a 1941 Delaware State Highway Map (Delaware State Highway Department 1941) (see Figure 8). However, when the McGinnis's only child, John Marion McGinnis, sold the property in 1963, the deed referred to the property as "at the former McGinnis and Lexington Mill site," indicating that the mill building was no longer present. Perhaps the mill was shuttered when George McGinnis died in 1943 (Kent County Deeds 1963). Both the deed to the McGinnis's and from John Marion McGinnis to Arthur Bright mentions "a large two-story frame dwelling house and sundry outbuildings erected thereon," but not a mill. Arthur Bright and his wife would own the property until 2006, when they sold it to a trust.

Evaluation: Mills were important buildings in agrarian societies. Farmers and other settlers needed wood from sawmills to build their shelters and agricultural buildings. Clearing timber also made more land available for planting. Once staples like corn and wheat were harvested, the crops needed to be turned into meal and flour at gristmills, either for home use or for sale. Other mills, such as bark mills, provided material for tanning leather or dyeing clothing. All were important components of rural economies.

Not surprisingly, sawmills and gristmills were some of the earliest industrial buildings established in agrarian societies. Sawmills were often impermanent in nature; they were built to be moved as land was cleared. Gristmills, however, needed heavy foundations and heavy framing to support a waterwheel, which transferred waterpower to the mill, and the large stone wheels that ground the grain. Mills also needed falling water to turn the waterwheel. This proved problematic in lower Delaware, where topographical variation is not great. In order to provide sufficient head to power a mill or mills, streams were dammed to create a pond. The milldam offered a place to cross a stream, and often a road and bridge would be built across it. Gates on the dam regulated the flow of water that powered the wheel. The proliferation of millponds in lower Delaware speaks to the large number of mills that once operated there.

A historic mill complex in the Upper Peninsula Zone consists of, at a minimum, the mill building or buildings or their remains, a milldam, and a millpond. If only the mill remains are present, they must be able to provide important information on the mill and/or its operation. Absent these features, a mill complex cannot convey historical significance. Mill

complexes may also contain other features, such as a mill house, head and tail race, and a bridge across the dam.

To be eligible under NRHP Criterion A, the mill complex must be important in local, state, or national history, and it must have the ability to convey that significance. To be eligible under NRHP Criterion B, a mill complex must be associated with a person of demonstrable significance; it must be associated with that person's productive life; and it should best reflect that person's historic contributions. To be eligible under NRHP Criterion C, the complex must provide important information on the function, technology, or construction of a mill building or mill complex. To be eligible under NRHP Criterion D, the mill complex must have the ability to yield information on mills or milling that is not available through other sources.

Although K-02748 was a mill property for 200 or more years, it is not eligible for NRHP listing as a mill complex under Criteria A or C. The property lacks the key resource(s) associated with a mill complex, the mill(s) or mill(s) remains. In the absence of this key resource, the complex cannot convey its significance as a provider of finished grain, wood, or tanning products. The mill-related resources that do exist -- the millpond, milldam, and miller's house -- indicate that a mill operation might have been present at this place at one time, but in the absence of the mill, they cannot convey the significance of the industrial operation.

K-02748 is also not eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion B. With one exception, none of the owners or occupants were highlighted in published Delaware histories or biographies. The exception is Samuel Virden, who was from a prominent Delaware family. Samuel Virden's great-grandfather, John Virdin (d. 1769), was among the earliest European settlers in Delaware. One of Samuel Virdin's sons-in-law, John W. Hall, Jr., would become Delaware's governor between 1879 and 1883. The Virden Family Papers are housed at the Special Collections Department of the University of Delaware library. However, prominence is not the same as demonstrable significance. Research did not reveal that Samuel Virden is remembered for doing anything demonstrably significant in Delaware history. Even if he had, K-02748 still would not be NRHP eligible under Criterion B. In order to be NRHP eligible, the property must be associated with the significant person's productive life and best reflect that person's historic contributions, which this property does not convey. The record is clear that Virden did not operate the mill, but leased it. Lexington Mills Farm, his separate 350-acre family farm, would be better associated with his productive life.

The J.B Tracy House/Miller's House (K-02748) property may be eligible as a mill complex under Criterion D for its potential as an archaeological site. Because multiple mills were operated on the property from the early eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, the property has the potential to contain archaeological resources that could convey important information on the function, technology, or construction of a mill, and to yield information on mills that is not available through other sources.

The house on K-02748 must also be evaluated for individual NRHP eligibility. No evidence was uncovered that the house was significantly associated with an important event. Consequently, it is not individually eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion A. Association with a demonstrably significant person under NRHP Criterion B is discussed above. The house is an altered mid- to late nineteenth century house built in the Italianate style, but it is not eligible for listing under NRHP Criteria C and D.

Italianate style houses, which were inspired by romantic images of Italian villas, were popular from ca. 1840-1885 (McAlester and McAlester 2002). Italianate style houses are often cubic in massing and generally two or three stories in height. They typically feature low-pitched, hipped roofs with wide overhanging eaves, which are sometimes ornamented with a widow's walk or central cupola. The most common detail associated with Italianate style houses is the use of decorative single or paired cornice brackets under the roof eaves and on porches. Other common Italianate elements include bay windows with inset wooden panels, corner boards, tall narrow windows with curved or molded window caps, and porches with arched openings and/or turned columns.

To be eligible for architecture under NRHP Criterion C, an Italianate style house must retain its original form and massing. It should possess characteristic elements of the style, including a bracketed cornice and tall narrow windows. Additional Italianate elements, such as decorative window hoods, double doors set in an arched surround, hipped roof with cupola, and decorative stoop, add to its significance. Unsympathetic additions, alterations, or renovations that obscure the original scale, massing, or materials compromise integrity and make the resource ineligible for listing.

Resource K-02748 is one of two Italianate style houses in the project area. The three-bay by two-bay house was originally designed as a nearly cubic volume with a hipped roof. It is difficult to ascertain the original orientation of the house (toward Barratts Chapel Road, McGinnis Pond Road, or most likely toward the former mill site to the south). Today there is no formal entrance and the house is accessed from the southeast corner at the rear of the driveway. Two major additions alter the scale and massing of the original design.

One-story additions on the south and east sides replaced original narrow porches with enclosed rooms that are twice as deep. The east side addition has a hipped roof, while the south side addition has a flat roof that functions as a roof deck with access from the second floor. Other alterations to the historic fabric of the house include the removal of the original widow's walk and (most likely) decorative brackets as well as the replacement of original materials with aluminum siding, asphalt shingle roofing, modern French doors and many new windows (Bright, personal communication 2008). Among the only discernable historic details are the very simple wood entablatures surrounding some of the paired narrow sash windows on the main block. Due to the loss of integrity, K-02748 is not eligible under NRHP Criterion C as an Italianate style house. Neither is the house likely to yield information on Italianate style house construction, which is not available from other sources. The framing and construction techniques are well known and well documented from this period. Alterations to the original layout of the house and the loss of the original porches further compromise the resource's potential to yield information. It is not eligible under NRHP Criterion D.

The J.B Tracy House/Miller's House (K-02748) resource is not eligible for NRHP listing, either as a historic mill complex or as an example of an Italianate style house.

K-02748 Photographs



House, west and south elevations, facing northeast.



House, north and west elevations, facing southeast.



House, south and east elevations, facing northwest.



Millstone address marker, facing southeast.



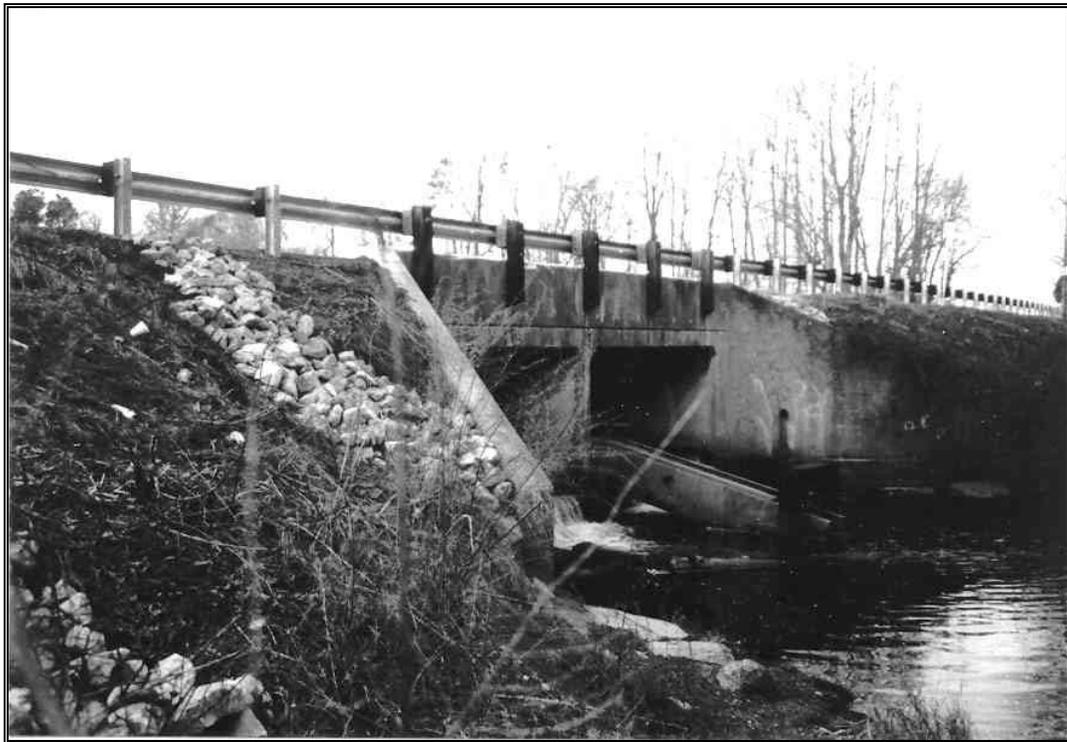
Garage (.002), north and west elevations, facing southeast.



Shed (.003), north and west elevations, facing southeast.



McGinnis Pond, dam, and bridge, west elevation, facing northeast.



McGinnis Pond bridge, east elevation, facing northwest.

K-02748 Mapping



K-02748 tax parcel on 2002 aerial photograph (Delaware DataMIL 2008).



K-02748 tax parcel on 1937 aerial photograph (Delaware DataMIL 2008).