

**4.3.11 K-02749. McIlvaine/Johnson House (T.H. McIlvaine House)  
865 McGinnis Pond Road  
SM-00-121.00-01-26.01**

**Description:** This one-acre property is located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Barratts Chapel Road and McGinnis Pond Road. The property contains a historic farmhouse, a frame storage shed, and a modern prefabricated storage shed. Access to the property is *via* a gravel driveway that extends past the south side of the house, with connections to Barratts Chapel Road and McGinnis Pond Road. The property is bordered by agricultural fields to the west and north, McGinnis Pond Road to the east, and Barratts Chapel Road to the south.

The house is a two-story, five-bay, I-house with an L-shaped plan built ca.1865. The front of the farmhouse, which parallels McGinnis Pond Road (east), features a partial width altered front porch. Its three-gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The building has a log foundation, with a replacement concrete block foundation skirting and vinyl and asbestos shingle siding. The historic porch at the southwest corner of the rear wing has been remodeled and is now enclosed with tinted glass. Many of the historic six-over-six double-hung wood sash windows are intact.

A late nineteenth century one-bay storage shed (.002) with front-gable roof is located to the southwest of the house. It is clad with vertical board siding. The north facade has a hinged wood door. The east and west elevations have six-light fixed windows. The south elevation is blank.

A modern prefabricated storage shed (.003) stands to the west of the house. It is a typical side gable storage building with double wood doors at the front (south).

**Applicable Historic Context(s):** Upper Peninsula Zone; Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880±); Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940±); Agriculture; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes; Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts; Other Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Houses.

**Historical Overview:** The K-02749 - McIlvaine/Johnson House dates to ca. 1865. The date is based on a variety of sources. The house does not appear on the 1859 map of Murderkill Hundred (French and Skinner 1859), but it is on the 1868 map (Beers 1868) (see Figures 3 and 4). The house was also shown on an 1867 Road Petition asking for the extension of Barratts Chapel Road to what is today McGinnis Pond Road (Kent County Road

Books 1867). The property's owner, Thomas H. McIlvaine, was first listed as a resident in the Murderkill Hundred tax assessment from 1868. Also, the date is consistent with the architectural style of the house.

The deed recording the purchase of the property by Thomas H. McIlvaine could not be located at the Kent County Recorder of Deeds Office, but McIlvaine was assessed for the property in 1868. He owned and lived on a 100-acre parcel, with 65 acres improved and 35 acres in timber. Buildings listed on the property were a two-story frame dwelling, smokehouse, barn, and stables, all in good repair. The land and buildings were valued at \$5,000. McIlvaine was also assessed for three horses, one pair of oxen, and two cows, which would make him a small, probably subsistence farmer (Kent County Tax Assessments 1868).

In addition to his home farm, McIlvaine also briefly (1864-1866) owned the K-02748 former mill complex, located just to the south of K-02749 on McGinnis Pond Road. Yet he did not appear in the 1870 population or agricultural censuses or the 1872 tax assessments of South Murderkill Hundred. The reason becomes clear in an 1874 deed selling K-02749: McIlvaine had overextended himself. In that year, K-02749 was sold to satisfy a judgment against McIlvaine in a suit brought by John W. Hall, Jr. The purchaser was Charles H. Lowber. The deed mentioned that the 100-acre property contained a two-story frame dwelling, a kitchen building, a barn, stables, and other outbuildings (Kent County Deeds 1874a:320).

Charles H. Lowber owned the property until his death *ca.* 1894. He probably lived there also; he did at the time of the 1880 agricultural census of South Murderkill Hundred. Based on the census, Lowber can be classified as a diversified, solidly middle class farmer typical of the area. The census estimated his holdings as 103 acres: 90 acres tilled; one acre in meadow, pasture, orchards, or vineyards; and 12 acres unimproved and not growing wood. It is assumed that the latter acreage would be wetland near the adjacent millpond. His farm, including the land, buildings, and fences, was valued at \$5,500, a respectable but not spectacular amount. Implements and machinery were worth an additional \$400, indicating that Lowber had a fair amount of the tools necessary to increase yield. His livestock, valued at \$600, included five horses, three milk cows, three neat cattle, eight swine, 45 barnyard poultry, and 230 other poultry. The livestock mix, particularly the high number of chickens and swine and the presence of the beef cattle, indicated that Lowber was producing for market. The number of poultry was particularly high; it is assumed the barnyard poultry were raised as fryers and the other poultry were kept for egg production.

The farm produced a variety of crops, including 150 dozen eggs (typical of the area), as well as 250 pounds of butter, 600 bushels of corn (grown on 30 acres of land), 240 bushels of wheat (grown on 16 acres of land), 160 bushels of sweet potatoes (grown on 1 acre of land), and 2,200 bushels of peaches grown on 1,000 bearing trees occupying 10 acres of land (U.S. Census 1880a). None of the yields are spectacular, but rather show a farmer who was above subsistence but not a major player in the area.

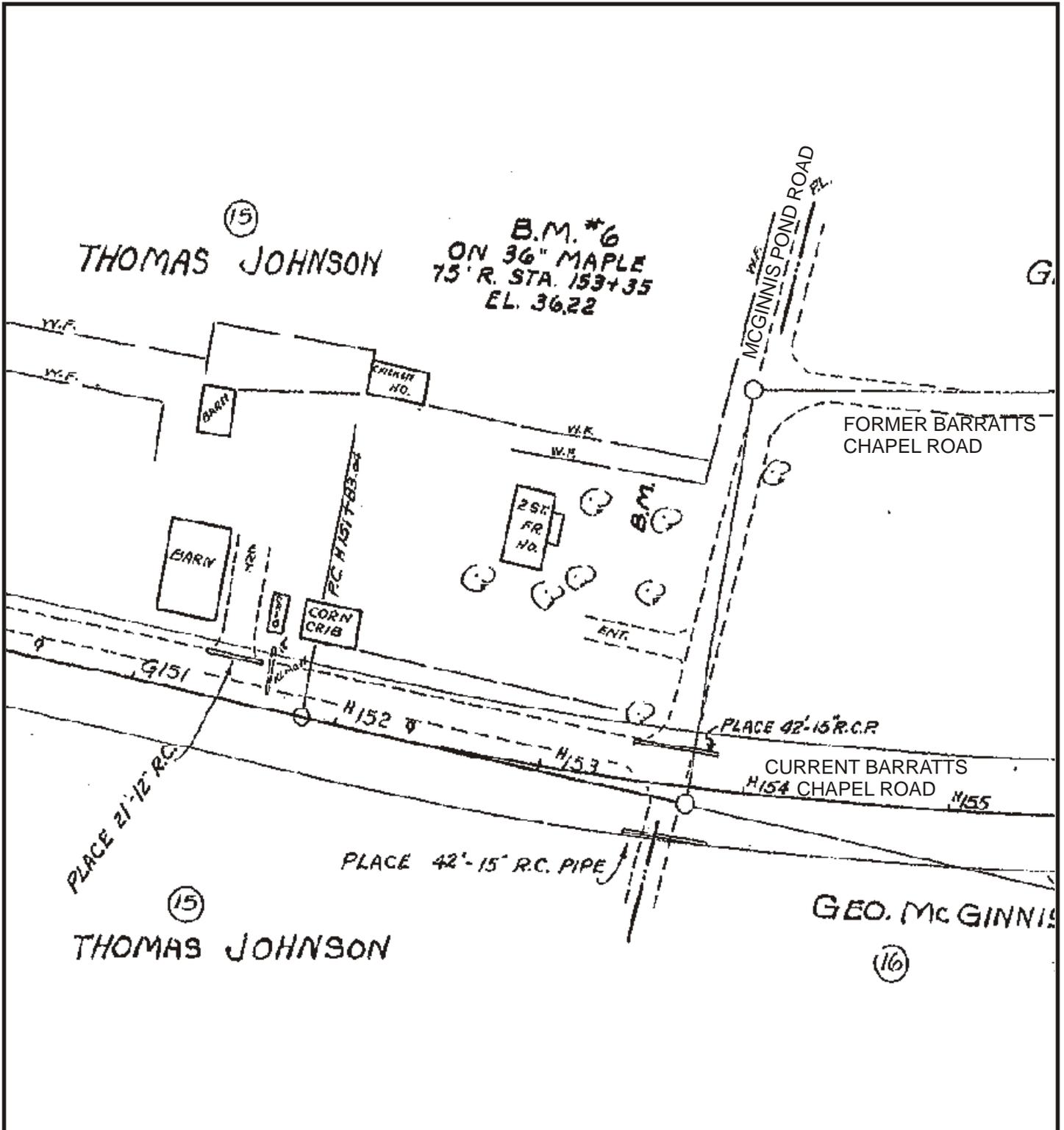
Lowber's son and heir sold the approximately 100-acre parcel to Samuel L. Richards in 1902. Richards's widow and their children, in turn, sold the property in 1909 to Thomas C. Johnson for \$5,500 (Kent County Deeds 1909:319). The Johnson family would retain the property until 1995.

Maps and aerial photographs provide snapshots of the buildings on the property in the mid- and late twentieth century. A 1938 as-built plan for improvements to Barratts Chapel Road (Delaware State Highway Department 1938) shows the farmstead as containing a two-story frame house, a corn crib, a large barn, a smaller barn, and a long chicken house (Figure 19). A similar mix of buildings seemed to be present in aerial photographs dating from 1954, 1961, and 1968 (Delaware DataMIL 2008). By 1992, the outbuildings seem more in keeping with what is presently on the property.

In 1995, the property apparently left the Johnson family, when a one-acre parcel containing just the house and two storage sheds was split off from the rest of the property (Kent County Deeds 1995:111).

**Evaluation:** The McIlvaine/Johnson House is evaluated for NRHP eligibility as an agricultural complex from both the Industrialization and Early Urbanization Era (1830-1880±) and the Urbanization and Early Suburbanization Era (1880-1940±). The farmhouse is also evaluated as an example of a mid-nineteenth century vernacular farmhouse.

An agricultural complex is composed of dwelling(s) and agricultural outbuildings, plus utilitarian and non-utilitarian spaces and features directly associated with these buildings. Also included are agricultural fields, woodlots, marshes, ditches, landscaped lawns, yards, gardens, drives, lanes, paths, and trash and other waste disposal areas and features (De Cunzo and Garcia 1992:250). An agricultural complex must have the ability to convey information or exhibit trends concerning national, state, or local agricultural development. Primary and secondary source historical documentation is used to substantiate the significance of an agricultural complex. The principal historic components of the complex, including the dwelling(s), domestic outbuildings, agricultural outbuildings, and utilitarian and



SOURCE: DELAWARE STATE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT 1938



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	
BARRATTS CHAPEL ROAD IMPROVEMENTS S.R. 1 TO MCGINNIS POND ROAD KENT COUNTY	
K-02749 IN 1938	
FIGURE - 19 NOT TO SCALE	SKELLY and LOY Inc. CONSULTANTS IN ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY ENGINEERING - PLANNING

non-utilitarian landscapes, must convey strong associations with the farm's period of significance. Changes to active farms are expected and will not preclude National Register eligibility. However, the major buildings, including dwelling(s) and barn(s) should retain much or all of their historic exterior fabric. In addition, to remain eligible, new construction must not dominate the old.

To be eligible under NRHP Criterion A, an agricultural complex must be significant in association with local, statewide, or national trends in agriculture and must be able to convey those trends. During the period from 1830 to 1880, Murderkill Hundred was a mixed farming area making a transition to orchard and perishable crops. During the 1880 to 1940 period, the area continued to grow a mix of crops, with an increased emphasis on vegetables and cannery crops. The McIlvaine/Johnson House does not convey associations with these historic trends or time periods. Only two historic buildings remain on the property, the house and a shed. In 1937, other agricultural buildings on the property included two barns, two corncribs, and a chicken house. These were apparently on the farm until at least 1968. One of the corncribs may remain (the shed, building K-2749.002), but the others have been removed. The farmhouse has been altered. Its siding is not original, an intrusive one-story addition has been added to the south and west sides, and the original porch in the legs of the ell has been enclosed. The farmland historically associated with the property is on a separate parcel from the house. The remnants of the farmstead do not convey associations with the agricultural history of the area.

To be eligible under NRHP Criterion B, a property 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. There is no evidence in the historical record that any of the owners or occupants were demonstrably important. None are highlighted in Delaware histories or bibliographies. Charles Lowber, the owner about whom the most information is available, was a typical farmer of his era. The property is not significant under NRHP Criterion B.

To be eligible under NRHP Criterion C for architecture, the principal historic components of the agricultural complex must be present and must convey strong associations with the farm's period of significance. Buildings and structures should also retain integrity of materials, design, feeling, and workmanship. As noted above, agricultural buildings historically associated with the property have been removed and the house is altered. The farmstead is not significant under NRHP Criterion C.

To be eligible under NRHP Criterion D, an agricultural complex must have the ability to yield important information on agricultural history and it must be the principal source of that information. Due to the absence of an intact, nineteenth century farmstead or historic buildings, the resource cannot convey information on agricultural complexes in South Murderkill Hundred, which is not available from other sources.

The McIlvaine/Johnson House is also individually evaluated for NRHP listing as an example of a mid-nineteenth century I-house. I-houses, even those from the mid-nineteenth century, are not an uncommon property type in Murderkill Hundred or Kent County. To be eligible for architecture under NRHP Criterion C, an I-house must retain its original form and massing. The best examples also contain elements of the architectural styles current at the time the house was built. The house should exhibit integrity of location, setting, design, feeling, association, materials, and workmanship. Unsympathetic additions, alterations, or renovations that obscure the original side gable I-house form compromise integrity and make the resource ineligible for listing.

The McIlvaine/Johnson House is not eligible for NRHP listing for architecture. The house retains its five-bay façade, L-shape, and many six-over-six wood sash windows. However, the front porch does not appear to be original; there is an intrusive addition on the south and west sides; the porch in the legs of the ell has been enclosed; two original chimneys on the main block of the house have been removed; and the exterior siding is not historic. Better examples of this housing type from this period exist in the county and hundred.

The McIlvaine/Johnson House is also recommended as not eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion D, ability to yield information on history not available through other sources. The construction date of the house is well-documented, which is not the case with some other resources in the project APE. The house was built ca. 1865. Framing and construction techniques from that time period are well-known and well-documented. Thus, it is unlikely that the house will yield additional information on either.

**K-02749 Photographs**



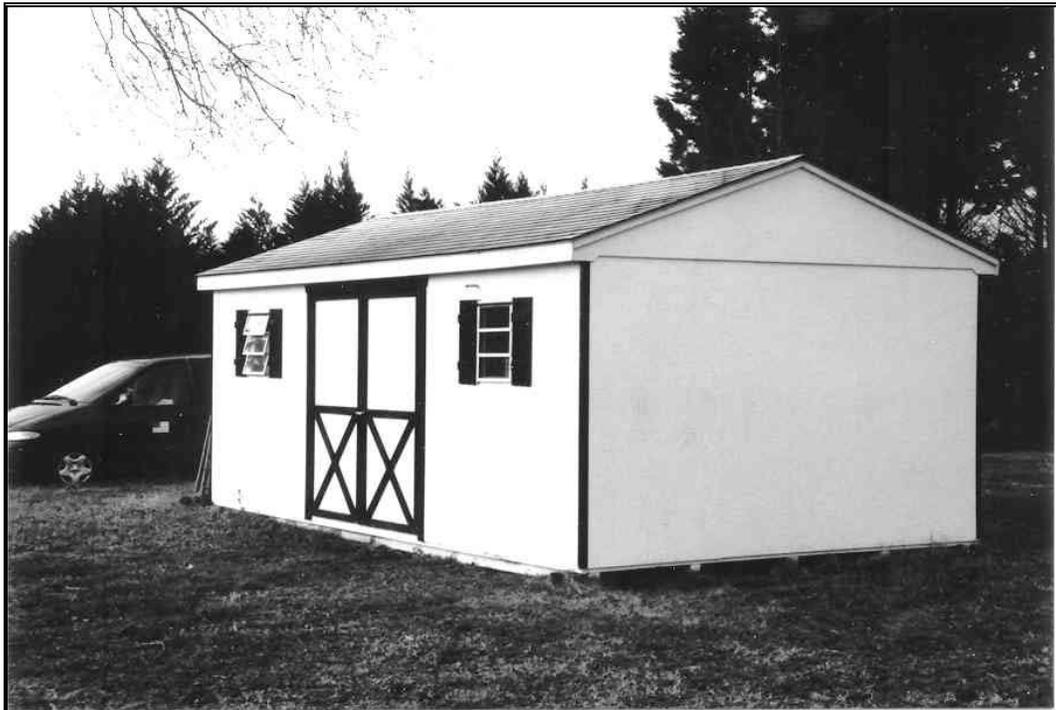
*House, south and east (front) elevations, facing northwest.*



*House, west (rear) and south elevations, facing northeast.*



*Storage shed/corn crib (.002), east and north (front) elevations, facing southwest.*



*Modern shed (.003), south (front) and east elevations, facing southwest.*

**K-02749 Mapping**



K-02749 tax parcel on 2002 aerial photograph (Delaware DataMIL 2008).



K-02749 tax parcel on 1937 aerial photograph (Delaware DataMIL 2008).