

4.3.8 K-02746. Melvin Farm Agricultural Complex
4400 Barratts Chapel Road
SM-00-131.00-01-01.00

Description: This 93.20-acre property is located on the south side of Barratts Chapel Road, opposite Buffalo Road. The property is fronted by a ca. 1860 farmhouse, with multiple outbuildings to the rear (south) (Figure 18). Access to the property is *via* an unpaved driveway that extends past the east side of the house. The property is bordered by agricultural fields to the east, south, and west, and Barratts Chapel Road to the north.

The dwelling is a two-story, five-bay, I-house with a brick foundation. The house has replacement asbestos shingle siding, which has been painted blue, and replacement aluminum sash windows. It has two one-story additions built ca. 1970 at the rear of the house. The front porch was altered and screened ca. 1985. The house features a standing seam metal side gable roof; the additions share an asphalt shingle roof. There are no surviving chimneys associated with the main block, but there is a modern chimney between the rear additions.

The shed (.002) immediately to the rear (south) of the house was built ca. 1940. It has a standing seam metal front gable roof and a mixture of aluminum and vertical board siding. The front (north) facade has a central wood pedestrian door. A short lean-to addition on the west side was probably completed after 1980. South of this shed is another shed (.003) built ca. 1985. It has a corrugated metal saltbox roof and vertical board siding. The front (east) facade has a pair of hinged barn doors.

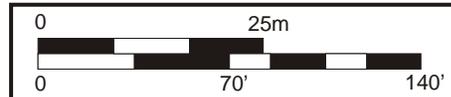
Further south of the farmhouse complex stands another shed (.004). The front-gable shed was built ca. 1985 and has some missing roofing. It has a concrete block foundation and walls, with vertical board under the gable ends. The front (north) facade has one window/vent opening under the gable and one large door opening at right-of-center.

A former barn (.005), which was built ca. 1960, is located nearby. It has a standing seam metal side gable roof and an earthen foundation. The elevations are covered with standing seam metal cladding, with vertical board under the gable ends. The front (east) facade features four open bays.

A dilapidated mobile home (.006) and another abandoned outbuilding (.007) sit at the north end of the property next to Barratts Chapel Road.



SOURCE: MICROSOFT 2010



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	
BARRATTS CHAPEL ROAD IMPROVEMENTS S.R. 1 TO MCGINNIS POND ROAD KENT COUNTY	
K-02746 FARMSTEAD IN 2010	
FIGURE - 18	SKELLY and LOY Inc. CONSULTANTS IN ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY ENGINEERING - PLANNING

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: Based on documentary records and architectural style, the Melvin farmhouse appears to date to ca. 1860. Evidence suggests Lewis Melvin built it in a bid to increase the value of his land.

Lewis Melvin purchased an agricultural complex of approximately 147 acres in 1844 from the heirs of John Walton. A deed from Walton's purchase of the land could not be located. The deed from Walton's heirs mentioned that the land included Walton's dwelling house and unnamed outbuildings. Walton had died intestate and his son, John Walton, Jr., was a minor (Kent County Deeds 1844), but no Orphans Court proceeding or inventory of Walton's belongings could be found to provide additional information.

An 1852 tax assessment of Lewis Melvin noted that he lived on the property. His farmstead included a two-story frame dwelling, smokehouse, corncrib, and stables, but all were in bad repair. The land and buildings were valued at only seven dollars an acre; good land, by contrast, went for \$10 or more per acre (Kent County Tax Assessments 1852). The 1850 agricultural census for Murderkill Hundred confirmed that Melvin was not a well-to-do farmer. The census valued his farm at the middling range of \$1,000, and credited him with owning only \$20 worth of machinery and implements. His livestock included only two horses, two beef cattle, and two swine, all undoubtedly for home consumption. He produced a relatively large amount of corn -- 600 bushels -- as well as 30 bushels of wheat, 20 bushels of Irish potatoes, 23 bushels of buckwheat, and \$25 of unspecified orchard products (U.S. Census 1850a).

Melvin's situation had improved markedly by 1860. For one thing, Melvin was now a landlord. K-02746 was in the tenure of John G. Melvin although L. Melvin was shown as the owner on the 1859 map of Murderkill Hundred (French and Skinner 1859) (see Figure 3). More importantly, the agricultural census from that year listed the cash value of the farm as \$4,000, a 400 percent increase from 1850. Implements and machinery were assessed at another \$125, showing that Melvin had purchased tools and equipment to increase his efficiency (U.S. Census 1860a). He increased his crop yields impressively compared to 10 years earlier. Two hundred-twenty bushels of wheat were harvested, compared to 30 bushels in 1850. Indian corn production had increased by 100 bushels to 700. Additional

crops were 20 bushels of oats (probably used as feed), 10 bushels of Irish potatoes, five bushels of sweet potatoes, and one bushel of peas and beans (U.S. Census 1860a). Livestock was still limited on the farm in 1860: two horses, two working cows, and one swine. The farm was now diversified and highly productive, which undoubtedly meant that Melvin used scientific farming techniques.

The tax assessment from the same year (1860) listed the buildings on the property as a two-story frame dwelling, kitchen, corncrib, stable, and smokehouse. Tellingly, all were in tolerable repair. Because the buildings were in tolerable rather than poor repair, because a kitchen building was now on the property, and because the value of the farm had increased so greatly, it is deduced that the farmhouse on the property in 1860 was not the farmhouse on it in 1850. Consequently, a *ca.* 1860 construction date is given for the house.

In 1867, K-02746 was sold to Frederick S. Symes for \$2,000. Symes was shown as the owner on the 1868 map of Murderkill Hundred (Beers 1868) (see Figure 4). Although the deed said Symes was “lately of Greene County, New York but now of Kent County, Delaware” (Kent County Deeds 1867), it is doubtful Symes ever actually lived on the farm. He was not listed in the Murderkill Hundred tax assessment for either 1868 or 1872, nor was he included in the hundred’s 1870 agricultural census. Symes also did not own the property for long. In 1872, he conveyed it to Paris T. Carlisle for \$2,500 (Kent County Deeds 1872).

The farm clearly remained in tenancy during Carlisle’s ownership. Paris Townsend Carlisle had joined his father’s mercantile, lumber, and building materials business in 1865. The younger Carlisle was successful, as his father had been before him. He sold the business in 1875, and subsequently gave “his attention exclusively to the care of his estate,” which included eight farms comprising 2,500 acres. He also owned “valuable town property,” including his house in Frederica (Runk 1899). Unfortunately, K-02476 did not appear in Carlisle’s name in the 1880 agricultural census of South Murderkill Hundred, so it was not possible to ascertain what his tenant was producing.

In 1903, Carlisle sold the property for the relatively modest sum of \$1,800. The following year it was sold again, this time for \$3,000. The jump in value could mean that improvements were made, and supplies another potential construction date for the house. The acreage of the farm was estimated as 100 acres more or less, whereas previously it had been listed as approximately 145 acres (Kent County Deeds 1904a). It is not clear if the farm had been subdivided or if the survey of the property was simply better.

The farm’s purchaser was David Wilcutts. His family owned the farm until the Great Depression, when they defaulted on a \$3,500 mortgage and lost the property through a

sheriff's sale. The deed noted that the farm included a two-story frame house, barn, stable, and other outbuildings (Kent County Deeds 1935). Between 1935 and 1962 the farm had a variety of owners, with the property sold every five to seven years. In 1962, Jacob and Helen Stahle purchased the property. They held it until 2003, when it was sold to a development company (Kent County Deeds 2003).

Aerial images from 1937, 1954, and 1961 show the buildings in the farmstead set back from the road. The farmhouse sits closest to the road, with the outbuildings arranged in a linear fashion behind them (Delaware DataMIL 2008). Today, the few remaining historic buildings are the altered farmhouse and two small sheds immediately behind the house. A non-historic barn and non-historic shed are also included in the farmstead ensemble.

Evaluation: The Melvin Farm Agricultural Complex 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±). There is evidence that a two-story frame dwelling and agricultural outbuildings have been present on the property since 1860. The farmhouse is also evaluated as an example of a mid-nineteenth or early twentieth century I-house.

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). An eligible 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, the dwelling(s), domestic outbuildings, agricultural outbuildings, and utilitarian and non-utilitarian landscapes, must convey strong associations with the farm's period of significance. Changes to active farms are expected and will not preclude NRHP 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 mixture of crops, with an increased emphasis on vegetables and cannery crops. There is no evidence in the historical record that the Melvin Farm has significance in those areas. Rather, it seemed to be a typical farm for the area in terms of size, income, and crops produced. Also, the remaining buildings do not reflect the property's history. The farmhouse is present, but altered. The barn is not historic. The remaining outbuildings are small, undistinguished, and do not reflect the historic uses and function of the farm, and a number of the buildings are not historic.

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. With one exception, no owner or occupant of the Melvin Farm is highlighted in published Delaware histories or biographies. The one exception is Paris T. Carlisle, who was a wealthy landowner. However, wealth and prominence are not the same as demonstrable significance, and even if Carlisle were historically significant, this farm would not best reflect his historic contribution. It was merely one of eight farms owned and leased by Carlisle in the late nineteenth century.

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. The Melvin Farm does not convey strong associations with either the 1830-1880 or 1880-1940 periods. The farmhouse, an I-house, could date from either era, but it is altered and undistinguished, compromising its ability to convey strong associations with the past. More importantly, the farmstead is devoid of significant historic buildings, and thus does not reflect significance as a nineteenth century agricultural complex. The farm's barn, the key agricultural outbuilding, is not historic. Also missing are the kitchen, corncrib, stable, and smokehouse referenced as being in the farmstead in nineteenth century records. There are also no orchards, fencing, or buildings related to vegetable or cannery crop production. The remaining buildings are either non-historic or, if they are historic, undistinguished.

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 and important historic buildings, the resource cannot convey information on agricultural complexes in South Murderkill Hundred not available from other sources.

The Melvin Farmhouse is also individually evaluated for NRHP listing as an example of a mid-nineteenth century or early twentieth century I-house. Either construction date is possible, based on historical evidence. 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 Melvin Farm I-house is not individually eligible under NRHP Criterion C for its architecture. The house retains its five-bay form, but little else. The exterior sheathing is not historic, an enclosed front porch has been added, and additions have been appended to the rear. It lacks any elements from architectural styles current in the mid-nineteenth century, including a cross gable. Better examples exist in the county and hundred.

However, as a potential mid-nineteenth century I-house, the Melvin Farmhouse may be eligible under NRHP Criterion D. Deconstruction and demolition may reveal that the resource contains information important to the understanding of vernacular architecture traditions, if it proves to date from the earlier period. If the building is to be demolished, moved, or renovated as part of a project, it should be evaluated by a qualified architectural historian or historic architect. Selective demolition should be used to fully determine and conclude that the property is eligible under NRHP Criterion D and that it has important information to yield. If it is determined that the building was constructed using standard building technology of the time, including balloon or platform framing, this property would not be eligible for listing under NRHP Criterion D and demolition could proceed. Should the property be recommended significant by the qualified architectural historian or historic architect, it should be fully documented prior to demolition.

The Melvin Farm Agricultural Complex is recommended as not eligible for NRHP listing, either as an agricultural complex or as an example of a mid-nineteenth century I-house.

K-02746 Photographs



Farmhouse (.001), east and north (front) elevations, facing southwest.



Farmhouse (.001) and outbuildings (.002, .003, .004, and .005), north (front) and west elevations, facing southeast.



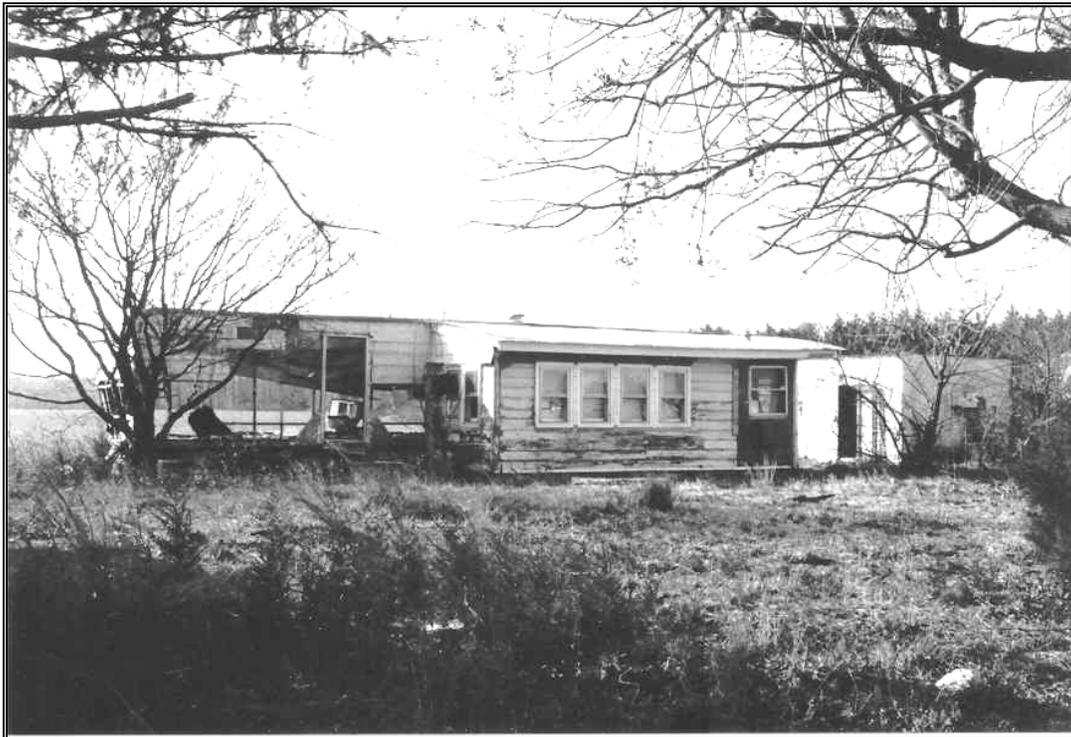
Outbuildings (.003 and .002) and farmhouse (.001), south (rear) and east elevations, facing northwest.



Outbuildings (.004 and .005), east and north elevations, facing southwest.



Outbuildings (.007 and .006), south (rear) and east elevations, facing northwest.



Outbuildings (.006 and .007), east and north (front) elevations, facing southwest.

K-02746 Mapping



K-02746 tax parcel on 2002 aerial photograph (Delaware DataMIL 2008).



K-02746 tax parcel on 1937 aerial photograph (Delaware DataMIL 2008).