

II. BACKGROUND RESEARCH

In accord with Federal and State of Delaware guidelines concerning National Register eligibility for historic resources, this investigation uses historic contexts to link the project area's history with property types describing the evolution of the project area's built environment. A context outlines levels of historical significance and architectural integrity that identified historic resources must possess in order to be determined eligible for listing in the National Register. Subsequent decisions regarding National Register eligibility compare levels of integrity and significance established by the context to the historical significance and architectural integrity of each identified historic resource. The use of historic contexts for the evaluation of National Register eligibility allows for the systematic evaluation of each resource's National Register eligibility based upon the historical evolution of the locale.

The following historic context has been divided into five chronological periods based on periods outlined in the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). Fieldwork and research identified four themes applicable to the historic resources found in the project area vicinity: (a) Agriculture, (b) Manufacturing, (c) Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change, and (d) Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts. These themes are discussed in each of the five chronological periods.

A. Exploration and Frontier Settlement, 1630-1730 ±

The project area for the planned improvements is situated where Paddock Road crosses Corcks Point Ditch in Blackbird Hundred, New Castle County (see Figure 1). The project area is located within the Upper Peninsula Geographic Zone as defined by the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). The Upper Peninsula consists of the area lying to the south of the fall line, inland from the shoreline of the navigable rivers and creeks, and north of the Kent-Sussex County boundary. The topography of this zone varies from level through gently rolling to steeply sloping. The surface soils also vary, ranging from medium-textured to moderately coarse, while subsoils are composed of sandy loam or sandy clay loam. Some areas are well-drained, others very poorly drained. Early European pioneers noted a rich variety of oak, hickory, poplar, walnut, and ash trees in the Upper Peninsula region prior to extensive land clearance activities. The region's major and minor creeks and streams generally drain eastward toward the Delaware River and Delaware Bay (Ames et al. 1989:34).

Colonial settlement of northern Delaware began in the early seventeenth century. The first Swedish, Finnish, and Dutch settlers concentrated their homesteads near the Delaware River in the northern end of the future state, basing their settlement's economic life on the fur trade and subsistence agriculture. After England acquired control of the region in 1664, agricultural settlement gradually intensified and moved inland along the region's larger creeks and streams. Settlement of northern Delaware increased significantly after William Penn began granting tracts of land in Delaware to English and Welsh immigrants in the 1680s. At this time the first movement into the Upper Peninsula by Europeans in significant numbers took place. Subsequently the town of New Castle developed as the region's first urban area. Slavery became a limited presence in the region toward the end of the period. Early architectural construction by Europeans consisted primarily of log or frame buildings erected quickly and not intended for permanent use (Ames et al. 1989:45-46; Herman et al. 1989:4).

Property types reflecting context themes during this period include non-nucleated agricultural settlements, pioneer trapping and hunting camps, roads, paths, early trails, landings, fords, ethnic impermanent architecture, and early durable buildings. Examples of these property types on the landscape should be considered extremely significant, as they provide information on the earliest settlement of the region.

Integrity levels of these property types are expected to be low; however, resources should retain some integrity of materials and location in order to convey their significance.

B. Intensified and Durable Occupation, 1730-1770 ±

Settlement and agricultural development of the region quickened during the eighteenth century. As population density increased, overland transportation networks were created that joined outlying agricultural areas with larger village centers and engendered further intensive settlement along their routes. New port towns, such as Odessa and Smyrna, developed in the Upper Peninsula to serve the Atlantic coastal trade. The region's agriculture emphasized diversified production on individual farms, consisting of wheat and other cereal cultivation, livestock raising, dairying, orchard tending, and vegetable gardening. Toward the end of the period, farmers began experimenting with ways to rebuild their fields' fertility. Architectural forms during this period primarily consisted of more permanent brick, stone, and log versions of Georgian and ethnic vernacular structures (Ames et al. 1989:46; Herman et al. 1989:23-26).

Property types indicative of context themes include roads, taverns, inns, villages, durable and permanent buildings, stair-passage dwellings, barns, granaries, and hay barracks. Survival rates and integrity levels for these property types are very low, similar to those from the Exploration and Frontier Settlement period, making surviving examples very significant. Resources documenting these trends should retain sufficient integrity of location, materials, and workmanship to convey information related to their significance.

C. Early Industrialization, 1770-1830 ±

During this period non-nucleated settlement continued as the mode in the Upper Peninsula, with some noticeable clustering around existing communities. The population continued to grow gradually into the early years of the nineteenth century, but after 1810 it began to decline in some areas. Slavery also began to wane in the region. Tenancy became more widespread in connection with the emergence of a dominant new class of wealthy farmers who invested in additional farmsteads and urban and village properties. Many of these prosperous agriculturists also participated in a burgeoning progressive agricultural movement (Ames et al. 1989:47-48; Herman et al. 1989:26-30).

Property types documenting context themes include roads, bridges, inns, taverns, villages, mills, hall-parlor and stair-passage dwellings, dwellings incorporating service wings, domestic outbuildings, farmsteads, and specific-function farm buildings. Although survival rates for dwellings, taverns, and major agricultural buildings are relatively good, these resources in the Upper Peninsula are under considerable pressure from modern development, especially in the northern portion of the region where the project area is located. Property types indicative of these themes should be considered very significant but must also retain higher integrity than resources documenting earlier periods. Resources must possess integrity of location, materials, workmanship, and feeling.

D. Industrialization and Early Urbanization, 1830-1880 ±

The introduction of improved transportation networks, such as turnpikes and railroads, greatly assisted both farming and manufacturing activities and linked the area with the larger regional economy. Rail access provided farmers with more efficient methods of transporting surplus produce to distant markets, thereby boosting productivity and the cultivation of lucrative cash crops. The major market commodities for farmers during the period were beef and butter, with peach orchards a profitable presence for a relatively brief boom during the years circa 1855-1870. Southern New Castle County's farmers also raised substantial quantities of wheat for market (though less than formerly) and corn, oats, and hay for livestock feed. The movement for agricultural improvement gained further strength because of the trend toward ever-increasing

intensification of cultivation and the accompanying soil erosion; this trend itself was a consequence of the ongoing division of farmsteads by inheriting generations in local families. Population growth regained its vitality during this period, especially in the northern portion of the region, accompanied by continued increase in the rate of tenancy in the countryside as well as in towns and villages. During this period the region's domestic, industrial, and agricultural architecture displayed tendencies toward increasing variation as the Victorian eclectic styles proliferated, the local industrial establishments further diversified, and farmers built multifunctional buildings, such as barns with basement stables and granaries flanked by attached corncribs (Ames et al. 1989:50; Herman et al. 1989:30-34).

With regard to the immediate project area vicinity, the two earliest known cartographic representations of settlement locations date to 1849 and 1868. The 1849 map indicates a settlement, probably a farmstead, occupied by J. Brown located approximately 1,000 feet south of the Bridge 463 site on the east side of the road, now known as Paddock Road. By 1868, according to the map of that date, this settlement, now occupied by the J. Spear Estate, had been joined by another evidently under the same ownership. The additional settlement location was situated on the west side of the road and about 700 feet south of the Bridge 463 site. To the north of the bridge site in the project area, two more settlements are indicated on the 1868 map just south of the junction of Paddock Road with the road now designated Smyrna Landing Road. Both settlements were situated on the west side of Paddock Road and both were apparently owned by G. E. Rothwell (Figures 2 and 3) (Beers 1868; Rea and Price 1849).

Property types documenting context themes include mills, towns, churches, schools, a variety of nineteenth-century architectural styles, single- and multiple-family dwellings, and multifunctional farm buildings. Although survival rates for resources of these types are relatively good, especially in comparison with resources from earlier periods, these resources are under pressure from modern development. Integrity levels are relatively high for these resources, requiring integrity of materials, workmanship, design, location, setting, and feeling.

E. Urbanization and Early Suburbanization, 1880-1940 ±

Despite decline in the profitability of wheat and peach cultivation, life in the rural landscape of southern New Castle County largely followed the traditional agrarian mode during the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth. After 1915, however, the spread of automobile ownership led to the construction of the Du Pont Highway (U.S. Route 13) and a general improvement in secondary roadways. In the Upper Peninsula region, initial suburban neighborhoods developed and commercial centers and residential neighborhoods of older towns expanded. New nonagricultural sources of employment, at the U.S. Air Force base at Dover and at the oil refineries around Delaware City, for example, became increasingly important to the region's inhabitants. In most areas of the Upper Peninsula, however, the economy continued to center on agricultural activity well into the mid-twentieth century. The emphasis in the region's agriculture during the latter half of the period was on truck farming for nearby urban markets and for canning concerns. The architectural forms in evidence during this period included a variety of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century architectural styles. A common house type in the new suburban developments was the bungalow (Ames et al. 1989:51; Herman et al. 1989:34-37).

In the project area, historical maps indicate that the arrangement of settlement locations remained the same in 1893 as it had been in 1868. Two farmsteads or other settlements owned by the J. Spear Estate were situated to the south of the Bridge 463 site, and two owned by G. E. Rothwell were situated to the north (Figure 4) (Baist 1893).

Property types representing context themes include bungalow-type houses and other dwellings representing the architectural styles of the period, early subdivision developments, factory complexes, bank barns, and

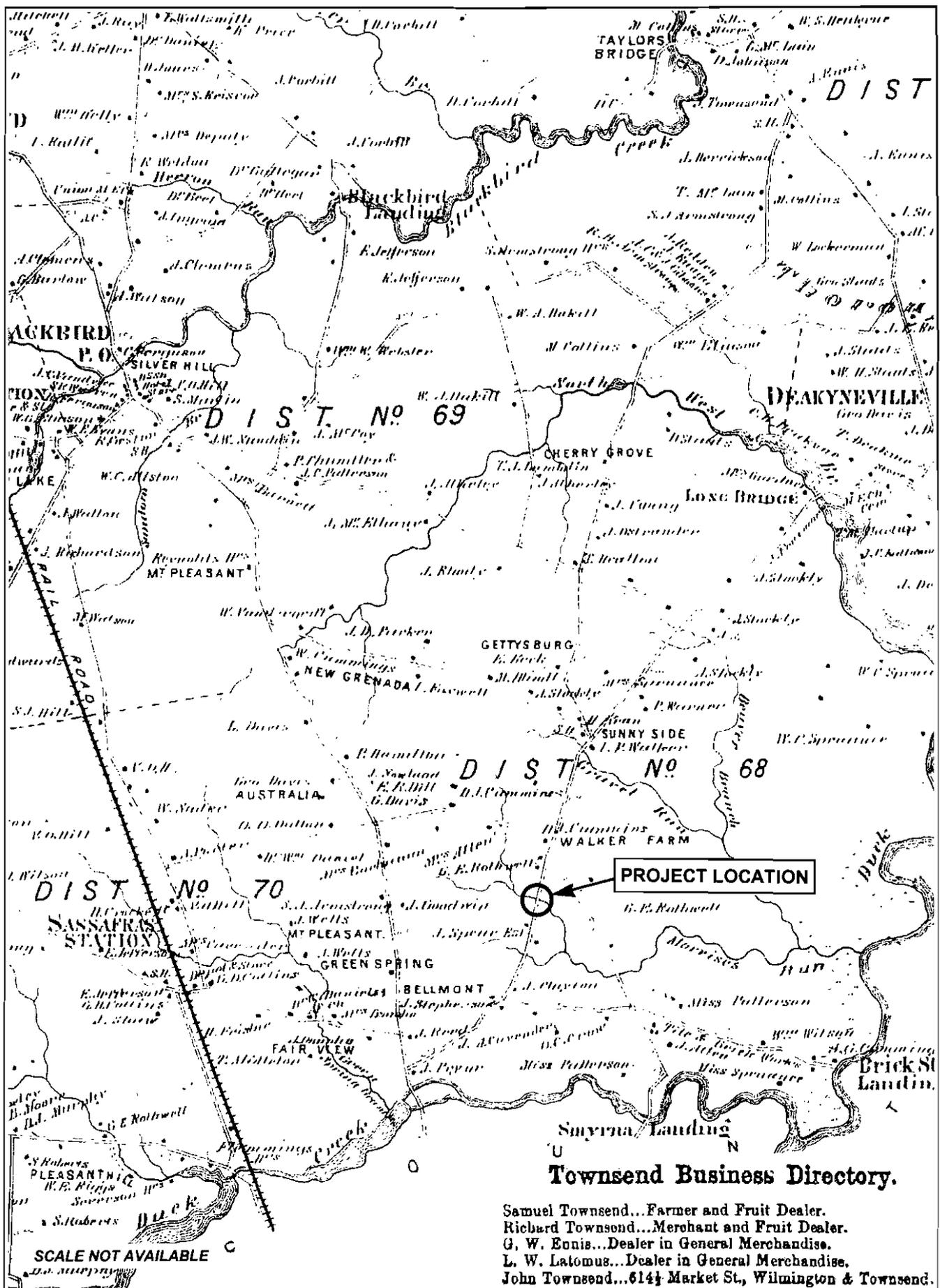


FIGURE 3: Project Area Vicinity in 1868

SOURCE: Beers 1868

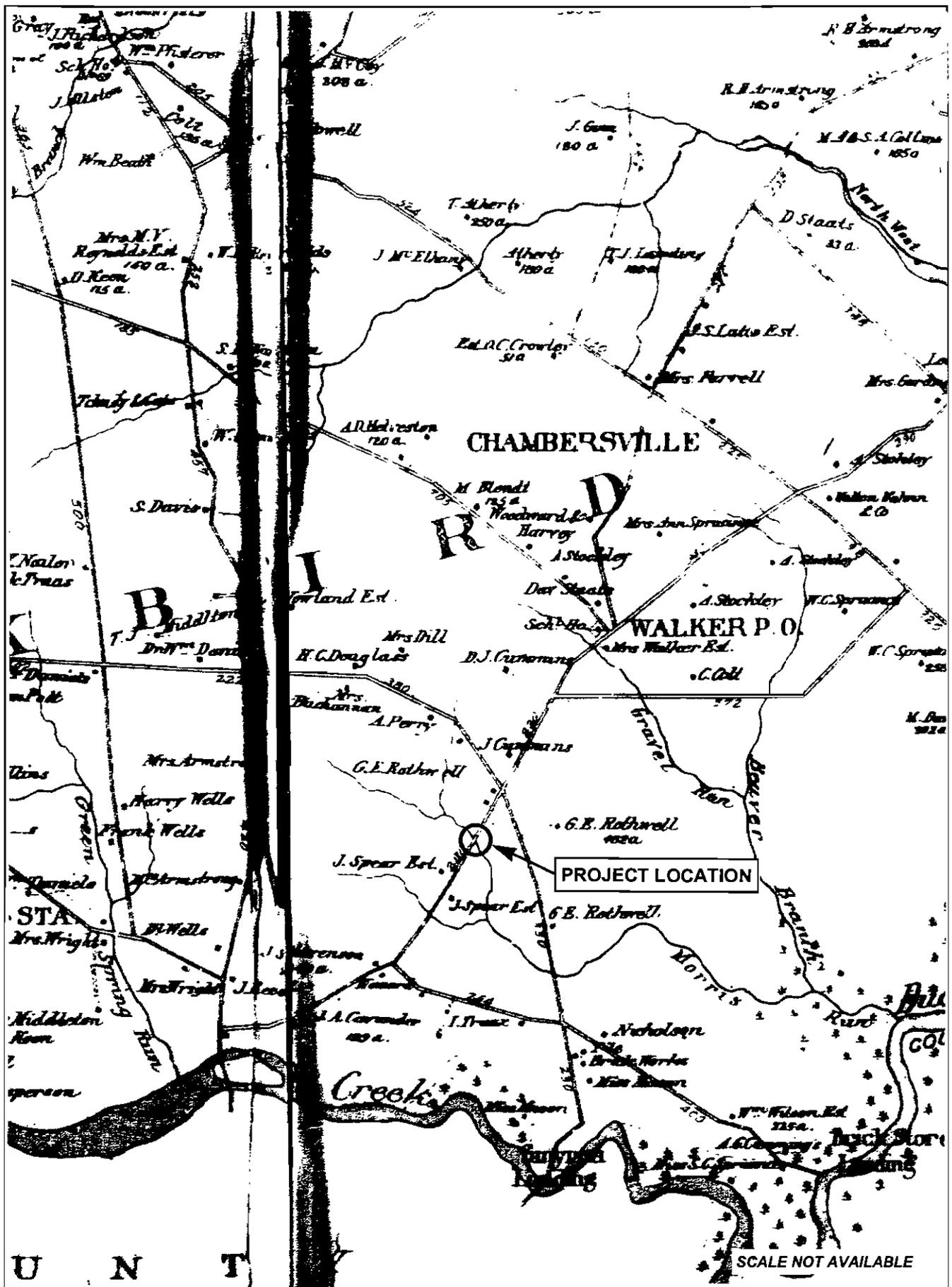


FIGURE 4: Project Area Vicinity in 1893

SOURCE: Baist 1893

truck and dairy farmsteads. Surviving resources representative of early suburbanization are fairly numerous. Resources related to agriculture and manufacturing, however, are threatened by recent land-use patterns and therefore require the same levels of cultural resource evaluation as those for property types dating to the 1830-1880 ± period.

F. The Upper Peninsula After circa 1940

Since the end of World War II in 1945, the Upper Peninsula region has experienced continued suburban growth. Much of the region's former agricultural land is now the locus for tract housing, although extensive areas of open land dotted with exurban residential properties remain. Associated development of strip- and mega-mall complexes, designed to accommodate the commercial needs of area residents unwilling to travel to congested urban or town centers, has also swallowed up considerable areas of former farmland. Business parks and research laboratories have also relocated to formerly rural areas, engendering additional suburban development and thus further propelling transformation of the Upper Peninsula's landscape.