

II. BACKGROUND RESEARCH

A. General Historic Context

In accord with Federal and State of Delaware guidelines concerning National Register eligibility for historic resources, this study 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 six 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 six chronological periods.

1. *Exploration and Frontier Settlement, 1630-1730 ±*

The project area for the planned improvement is situated where Snuff Mill Road crosses Burris Run, a tributary stream of Red Clay Creek in Christiana Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware (see Figure 1). Christiana Hundred is located in the northern part of New Castle County, and its boundary adjoins Pennsylvania. The project area is located within the Piedmont geographic zone as defined by the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). As the northernmost of the state's five geographic zones, the Piedmont consists of the area lying above the fall line that separates this zone from the Coastal Plain. A nearly level to hilly topography composed of fertile clay soils well suited for agriculture characterizes the Piedmont's surface. Early European pioneers noted a rich variety of oak, hickory, poplar, walnut, and ash trees in the Piedmont region prior to extensive land clearing activities. The region's major and minor creeks and streams, including Red Clay Creek, generally drain southeastward into the Christiana River, which flows northeastward before entering the Delaware River at Wilmington (Ames et al. 1989:32-34).

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, basing their settlement's economy 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. Before the stream became clogged with silt, the Christiana River provided an important transportation network into the hinterland areas as greater areas of land were cleared to support the expanding agricultural economy. Settlement of the region increased significantly after William Penn began granting tracts of land in Delaware to English and Welsh immigrants in the 1680s. By around 1710, English, Welsh, and Ulster Scots settlers were moving into the immediate vicinity of the project area, perhaps preceded by a few people of the old Swedish or Dutch stock. 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; Lake 1976:17-18).

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

2. 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 connected outlying agricultural areas with larger village centers and engendered further intensive settlement along their routes. Agriculture in the region 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. 1989:5-7).

Property types indicative of context themes include roads, mills, 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.

3. Early Industrialization, 1770-1830 ±

Despite heavy silting that denied navigation, the Piedmont's watercourses provided power for mills and early manufacturing. At first used primarily to power gristmills and sawmills, by the early 1800s the area's streams provided water flow for a wide variety of manufacturing establishments, including tanyards, paper mills, woolen mills, carding mills, and spice mills. In 1802 the French emigré and entrepreneur Eleuthère Irénée du Pont began the operation of a gunpowder mill on Brandywine Creek. Partly in response to the mills' demands for workers, nucleated settlements developed surrounding these early industrial centers (Ames et al. 1989:47-49; Herman et al. 1989:9).

Despite continued industrial growth along the Piedmont's rural waterways during much of the nineteenth century, however, agriculture remained the predominant land use throughout the region. By the early nineteenth century very little uncultivated arable land remained in the Piedmont. The progressive agricultural movement emerged as a noteworthy aspect of farming in the region. Farmers increasingly introduced fertilization, systems of crop rotation, and new strains of grass, such as clover and timothy. The major field crops remained wheat, barley, and Indian corn, while the raising of beef cattle for market received greater emphasis. With pressure from a growing population, the use of intensified agricultural methods increased, especially as the amount of improved land rose by some 10 percent over the years 1798-1820 and the average size of a farm decreased by more than 30 percent over the same interval (Ames et al. 1989:47-49; Herman et al. 1989:8-9).

The predominant architectural forms in the region during this period continued the trend toward more substantial and permanent construction of Georgian and ethnic vernacular buildings. The most common type of house constructed was the 1½-story hall-parlor plan, often with a lean-to kitchen to the side or rear. A common farmstead arrangement (in 31 percent of homesteads, according to one count) was that of a dwelling with a single agricultural outbuilding. Homesteads ran the gamut, however, from those consisting of a single

house without outbuildings to those with two dwellings and several domestic and agricultural outbuildings with specific functions. The bank barn, a type that was directly influenced by agricultural practices in neighboring Pennsylvania, appeared on the Piedmont landscape during the later years of this period (Herman et al. 1989:9-10).

Property types documenting context themes include roads, bridges, inns, taverns, villages, mills, hall-parlor and stair-passage plans, 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 Piedmont are under severe pressure from modern development. Property types indicative of these themes should be considered very significant but also must retain higher integrity than resources documenting earlier periods. Resources must possess integrity of location, materials, workmanship, and feeling.

4. 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 Wilmington & Western Railroad was the third railroad to open a route through Christiana Hundred, in 1872, preceded by the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad in 1831, and the Wilmington and Northern Railroad in 1869 (see Figure 1). The rail line of the Wilmington & Western passed about 1.5 miles southwest of the Bridge 88 location. The major market commodities for farmers during this period were beef and butter. They also raised substantial quantities of wheat for market (although less than previously) and of corn, oats, and hay for livestock feed. The movement for agricultural improvement gained further strength as a result of the ever-increasing intensification of cultivation and the accompanying soil erosion, which itself was a consequence of the ongoing division of farmsteads by the inheriting generations of local families (Herman et al. 1989:12; Scharf 1888:885).

Industry began to surpass agriculture as the dominant economic pursuit in the Piedmont during these years. Cotton mills, iron-rolling mills, and large-scale slaughterhouses joined the array of industrial establishments operating in the region. In addition to furnishing improved transport for the export of finished goods, railroads provided manufacturers with a means to import raw materials not available locally. The railroads also helped focus commercial activities and further settlement in villages and towns with rail stations (Ames et al. 1989:49-51; Herman et al. 1989:12-13).

During this period the region's domestic, industrial, and agricultural architecture all 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 (Herman et al. 1989:14).

The first map depicting homestead ownership in the project area vicinity was published by Rea and Price in 1849 (Figure 2). No homesteads or other settlement sites were situated immediately adjacent to the Bridge 88 location at that time, and Snuff Mill Road had not yet been laid out. Snuff Mill Road was in place when the second such map, the Beers 1868 state atlas, was published. The 1868 map indicates that a homestead belonging to A. Brown had been established by that time immediately to the northeast of the Bridge 88 location (Figure 3) (Beers 1868; Rea and Price 1849).

Property types documenting context themes include mills, workers' housing, towns, churches, schools, manufacturing concerns, a variety of nineteenth-century architectural styles, single- and multiple-family dwellings, multifunctional farm buildings, and large dairy barns. Although survival rates for resources of these types are relatively good, especially in comparison with resources from earlier periods, these resources

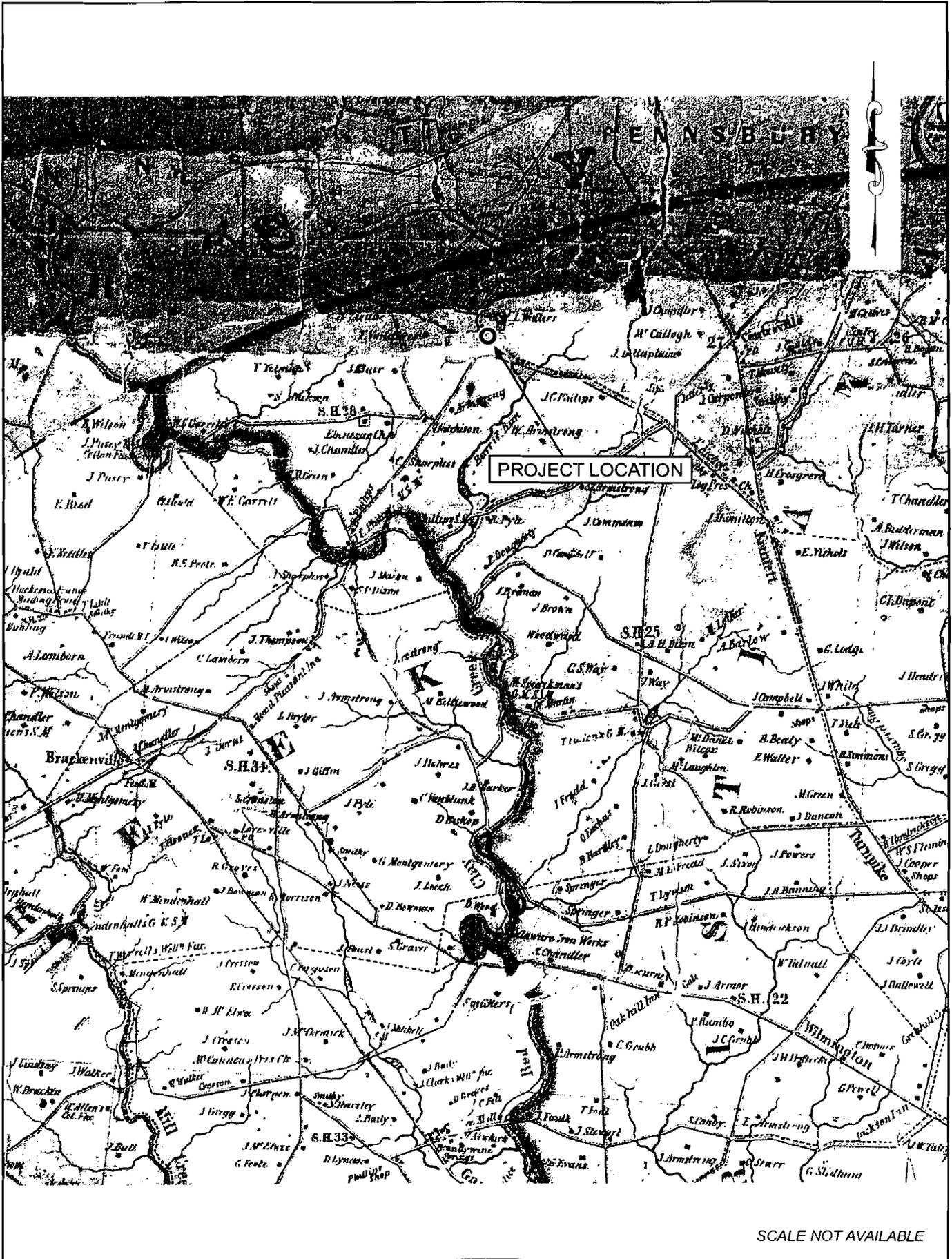


FIGURE 2: Project Area Vicinity in 1849

SOURCE: Rea and Price 1849

are under pressure from modern development. Integrity levels are relatively high for these resources, requiring integrity of materials, workmanship, design, location, setting, and feeling.

5. *Urbanization and Early Suburbanization, 1880-1940 ±*

As the City of Wilmington evolved into the state's largest population and industrial center during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of the Piedmont's smaller manufacturing centers languished. The Du Pont Company's fortunes surged during World War I as a result of the Allied Powers' demand for gunpowder and explosives, leading to a period of expansion for this key firm among the Piedmont's manufacturing concerns. Improved transportation networks, such as electric trolley lines, and the rise of a substantial middle class helped lead to the development of suburbs on former agricultural land in outlying areas surrounding Wilmington. The introduction of the automobile and associated improvements to the area's road networks further intensified suburban development around Wilmington. A rather specialized form of suburban development was seen in the creation of country house estates for du Pont family members, their associates, and fellow factory owners along the Brandywine Creek valley above Wilmington, chiefly in Christiana Hundred (Ames et al. 1989:51; Herman et al. 1989:18).

Throughout many areas of the Piedmont, however, particularly those more distant from Wilmington, the economy continued to rely on agriculture. The owners of the estates also followed agricultural pursuits, although with less concern for profitability than the more typical farmer. The emphasis in Piedmont agriculture during this period was on the production of dairy commodities, beef, and, to a lesser degree, wheat and corn (Herman et al. 1989:15-16).

The architectural forms in evidence on the Piedmont landscape during this period included a variety of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architectural styles. A common house type in the new suburban developments was the bungalow (Herman et al. 1989:17).

The map of New Castle County published in 1881 showed the settlement configuration of the project area vicinity as considerably altered from that of 1868. The 1881 map shows R. Garrett as residing at the homestead to the northeast of the Bridge 88 location that had been formerly occupied by A. Brown. Another homestead, that of M. Kane, had been established since 1868 just to the west of the bridge (in a location not occupied by a house or other building as of 2000). Both dwellings were depicted as standing immediately on the public road. Also established by 1881 was a gristmill built about one tenth of a mile to the north of the Bridge 88 location, with a large millpond extending northward from the mill (Figure 4). To the northwest of the gristmill was the residence of William P. Passmore, probably the mill owner. Baist's county atlas of 1893 showed the 1881 settlement features and property owners still in place (Figure 5) (Baist 1893; Hopkins 1881).

Property types representing context themes include bungalow-type houses and other dwellings representing the architectural styles of the period; country house estate complexes consisting of mansions, servant quarters, tenant houses, and specialized outbuildings, such as greenhouses and large coach houses or garages; early subdivision developments; factory complexes; bank barns; and truck and dairy farmsteads. Surviving resources representative of early suburbanization are very numerous, and the survival rate for estate buildings also appears to have been fairly high up to the present. 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 property types dating to the 1830-1880 ± period.

6. *The Piedmont Since Circa 1940*

Since the end of World War II in 1945, the Piedmont has experienced continued suburban growth and extensive development. Much of the region's former agricultural land is now the locus for tract housing.

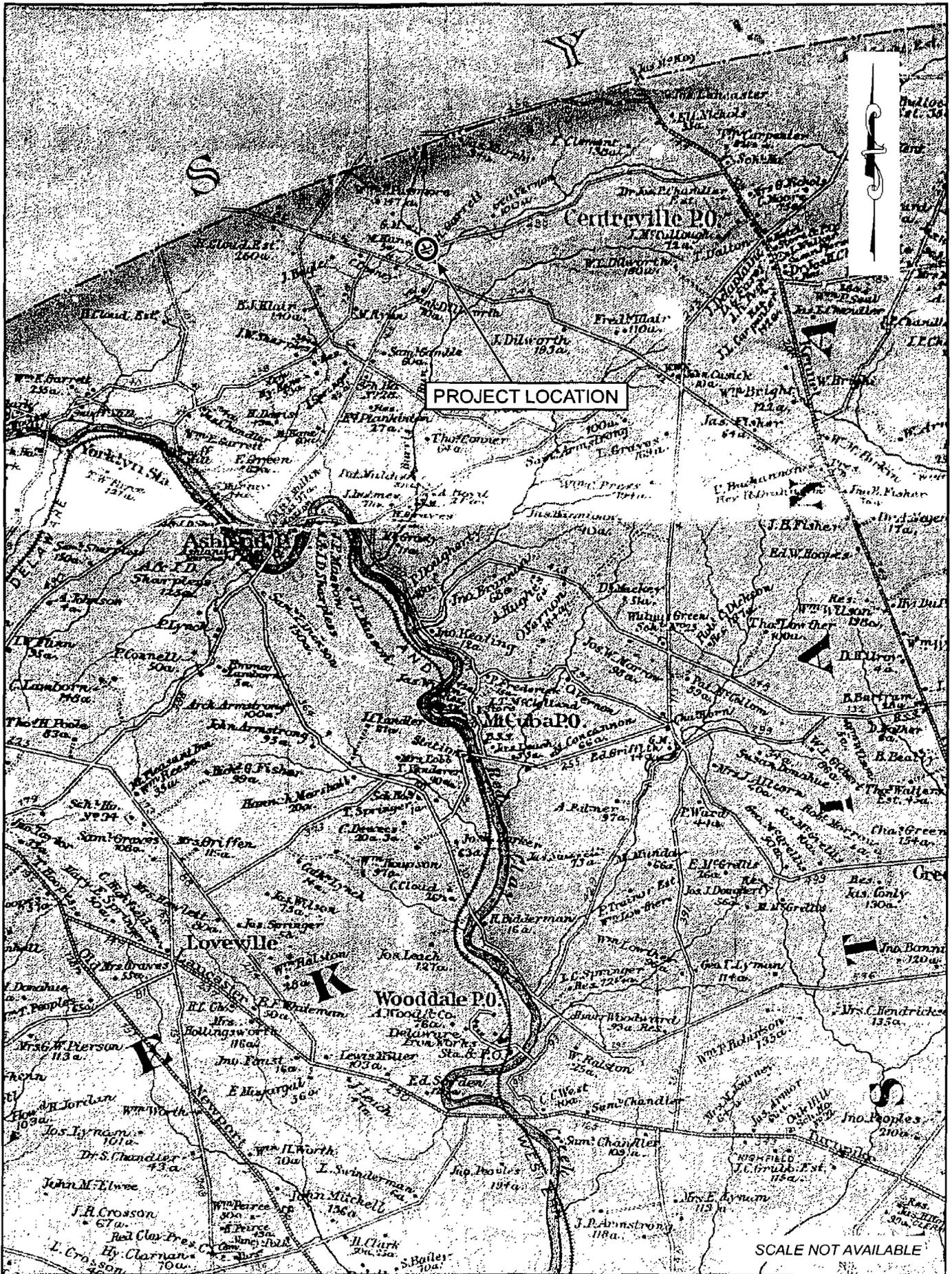


FIGURE 4: Project Area Vicinity in 1881

SOURCE: Hopkins 1881

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 large areas of former farmland. Business parks and research laboratories have relocated to formerly rural areas as well, generating further suburban development and transforming the Piedmont's landscape.

B. Site-Specific Historic Context: The Brown-Garrett House

The Brown-Garrett House stands on a lot that existed from 1859 until 1903 as a small parcel encompassing just over one acre of land. During those years the property was occupied by successive owners Ann Brown and her son, Reuben Garrett. Ann Brown, at the advanced age of approximately 78 years, purchased the property in March 1859. The house, which is a vernacular building showing Gothic Revival stylistic influence, exhibits the form and detail typical of small dwellings of that period, suggesting that it was built around the time of or not long before Ann Brown bought the land. No house is indicated at this location on the county map of 1849; however, the map of 1868 shows "A. Brown" as residing on the lot (see Figures 2 and 3) (Beers 1868; New Castle County Records [NCCR], Deed F7:416; Rea and Price 1849).

The population census return for 1860 recorded Ann's son, Reuben, then referred to as Reuben Brown, as the head of the household in which Ann resided. Reuben, who earned his living as a farm laborer, was then 45 years old, and Ann was 79. Although both residents were listed in the census as having been born in Delaware, neither appeared in the Christiana Hundred return for the preceding census. The value of the Brown household's real estate reported in the 1860 return, \$600, was identical to the purchase price stated in the 1859 deed for the property that Ann Brown had purchased from local landowner Nathaniel W. Sharpless. The correspondence in the real estate value reported in the two records along with the fact that this sum would seem to be a high price for an unbuilt, one-acre, roadside rural lot at that date suggests that the house was already standing in March 1859. Perhaps the Brown family had been renting the house for a period before the purchase. Sharpless, who had owned the larger property of about 150 acres for just three years since 1856, had this little parcel surveyed out before selling the main tract to John Yeatman (NCCR, Deed F7:416; United States Bureau of the Census [U.S. Census] 1850 and 1860).

The modest value of Reuben's personal estate reported in the 1860 census, \$200, was probably fairly typical for a white farm laborer in the region at that time. Reuben and his mother, Ann Brown, shared the house with Reuben's 25-year-old wife, Rebecca; their three children, Mary (six years old), Sarah (four years old), and Howard (two years old); and boarder John Bass, a fellow white farm laborer who was 60 years of age (U.S. Census 1860).

Ann Brown died in 1862. Her will devised all of her real and personal estate to Reuben, her son and only child, again referred to as "Reuben Brown," for his use during his lifetime, after which the estate was to descend to his children. By 1870 Reuben was going by the surname Garrett; this name appears in the population census entries of that date and 1880, as well as on the maps of 1881 and 1893 (see Figures 4 and 5). The reason for the change of name is unknown. In 1870 Reuben's real estate value had increased to \$1,000, although the value of his personal estate was listed at just \$100. By that date, two more children had joined the older three: George, who was then eight years old, and Lizzie, who was four. When the census-taker returned in 1880, all five older children had left home, and a final seven-year-old daughter, Eva, was in residence with Reuben and Rebecca. Also living in the Garrett household in 1880 was boarder Tagart J. Marshal, a 52-year-old white farm laborer (Baist 1893; Hopkins 1881; NCCR, Deed S19:404; U.S. Census 1870 and 1880).

Reuben Garrett died in 1898. In 1903 his widow, Rebecca, and other heirs, most of whom then lived in Wilmington, sold the house and parcel to John C. Elliott. The deed stated that the small parcel contained outbuildings in addition to the dwelling; the deed offered no description of the auxiliary structures, none of which survive today. Elliott also owned the larger adjoining tract, of which the Brown-Garrett House lot had

been part before 1859. This approximately 150-acre property, which lay adjacent to Snuff Mill Road on both sides and almost surrounded the Brown-Garrett lot, had passed from John Yeatman to William P. Passmore by 1868, and then to Elliott at some time during the years 1893 to 1903. Passmore had operated a gristmill on the property (see Figures 4 and 5) (Baist 1893; Hopkins 1881; NCCR, Deed S19:404, W26:178).

Following the death of John C. Elliott in 1915, the property passed to his son, George A. Elliott. In 1927 Elliott sold it to Edmund C. McCune, and in 1938 it was purchased by Harry G. Haskell. It was evidently Haskell who truly converted the Passmore property into a rural residence for a wealthy Wilmingtonian, although this process may have begun on a more modest and rustic basis during the ownership of the Elliotts and McCune. Many neighboring homesteads were converted for this purpose during the years 1890 through 1940. According to Howard Tibet, who has occupied the Brown-Garrett House as a tenant since 1942, Haskell's large Colonial Revival mansion was completed in 1941. The mansion occupies the site of the old Passmore dwelling, approximately three tenths of a mile northwest of the Brown-Garrett House, which now serves as a gatehouse for the estate. In 1938, the gristmill, which had been situated about one tenth of a mile north of the Brown-Garrett House, was demolished, and the estate's party house, a building used for entertaining, was erected in its place. The property is now known as "Shadowbrook" (Delaware SHPO CRS Form N-1131.2; NCCR, Deed W26:178, V34:176, T40:353; Tibet 2000).

Title Information: Brown-Garrett House

March 16, 1859 Nathaniel W. Sharpless and wife Maria, of Christiana Hundred, to Ann Brown, for 1 acre, 10 perches, price \$600. This lot was part of a larger property that Sharpless had purchased from David W. Taylor on April 28, 1856 (NCCR, Deed F7:416).

Metes and Bounds of the Brown lot, 1859 (abstracted)

Beginning in the line of John Yeatman, and in the middle of "the Road leading from the Kennett Turnpike [present-day State Route 52] to the Road from the Brick Church to Kennett Square [present-day Old Kennett Road]," i.e., present-day Snuff Mill Road

With the said road, heading S57.5°W 22 perches

By the line of the Caleb Sharpless woodland N7.5°W 15.2 perches

By the line of John Yeatman N82°E 12.6 perches, S71°E 8.2 perches to the Place of Beginning

Containing 1 acre, 10 perches in area [NCCR, Deed F7:416]

1862 Will of Ann Brown (died circa February 1, 1862): devised her real and personal estate to son Reuben Brown during his life, afterwards to his children (referred to in NCCR, Deed S19:404).

November 21, 1903 The Estate of Reuben Garrett (the heirs being his widow Rebecca Garrett, of Wilmington, et al.) to John C. Elliott, for 1 acre, 10 perches with "the stone dwelling house and other buildings thereon," price \$500. This deed made reference to the Ann Brown will, stating that Reuben had been known as "Reuben Brown" in 1862. He had died on October 5, 1898 (NCCR, Deed S19:404).

May 11, 1917 The Estate of John C. Elliott to George A. Elliott, for three tracts of 157.1 acres, 12.07 acres, and 1 acre, 10 perches (NCCR, Deed W26:178).

- March 4, 1927 George A. Elliott and wife Anne G. to Edmund C. McCune, for the same three tracts (NCCR, Deed V34:176).
- January 31, 1938 Edmund C. McCune to Harry G. Haskell, for the same three tracts (NCCR, Deed T40:353).
- 1951 Will of Harry G. Haskell (died January 4, 1951): devised the property to his daughter Elizabeth Haskell Fleitas (New Castle County Will File 30468, referred to in NCCR, Deed U84:952).
- April 30, 1971 Elizabeth Haskell Fleitas, divorced, to Gerret VanSweringen Copeland, for 140.84 acres (NCCR, Deed U84:952).
- August 1, 1978 Gerret VanSweringen Copeland to the Shadowbrook Limited Partnership, for 140.84 acres (NCCR, Deed R102:293).