

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Historic Context

In general, the history of Delaware is divided into five time periods beginning with the exploration of the area by numerous European nations and concluding with modern urbanization of the state itself. These periods are: Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630–1730), Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730–1770), Transformation from Colony to State (1770–1830), Industrialization and Capitalization (1830–1880), and Urbanization and Suburbanization (1880–1940). Considering that the property was not patented, and likely not settled by Europeans, until 1734 and that no significant archaeological remains were recovered dating prior to 1730, this historical background will not address the period of Exploration and Frontier Settlement (see Baublitz et al. 2006 for a full treatment of the historical context of the area). The site-specific history of the Burnham House parcel is integrated into these pre-defined historic periods below.

Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730–1770)

In the eighteenth century, Delaware saw an increase in population as well as commercial expansion. The main settlements were in Wilmington, New Castle, and Lewes. Milling operations prospered in response to the abundance of wheat produced in New Castle County. This led to the establishment of other industries in Wilmington, including shipbuilding, coopering, and import-export trading. Several overland transportation corridors aided the growth of agricultural properties further inland. Extant early roadways in the project area include the Choptank Road and the current Route 301, which follows much of the upper King's Highway that leads from Middletown to Summit Bridge. The upper King's Highway, also known as the upper King's Road, was laid out in the 1760s, but has been noted as following the path of the "Maryland Rode" in a 1703 resurvey of a tract near Summit Bridge (Wilkins and Quick 1976:45). In his book entitled, *History of Delaware*, John Thomas Scarf (1888:991) referred to the Choptank Road as marking the eastern boundary of Bohemia Manor, and being a "very old road" in the late-nineteenth century. Archival research suggests that other Settlement Period roadways have largely disappeared from today's landscape, including Herman's Cart Road and the Old Reedy Island Road, although traces of these pathways may still be found below ground.

Most of the state's residents were farmers with 80 to 90 percent reported to be engaged in agriculture (Egnal 1975:201). Lands once reserved as forests or marshes were cleared and incorporated into the crop cycle as the need for more land for crops increased. Many large estates and land grant parcels were divided, creating new farm properties centered on supplying the market-driven agricultural economy (Frederick et al. 2006:56). Beginning in the latter-half of the eighteenth century, land in St. Georges Hundred was increasingly developed by tenant farmers who built farmsteads while paying rent to a growing number of absentee landlords (Gundy and Kuncio 2009:40). Wheat was the primary crop, followed by rye, corn, barley, oats, and a variety of vegetables (Main

1973). Livestock supplemented farmers’ income from surplus crops as an increased need for labor was filled by indentured servants and slaves (Frederick et al. 2006:56).

It was during this period that the Burnham House property was first referenced in the historical record. In 1734, Thomas Noxon, an entrepreneur living near Middletown, was granted 300 acres (121.41 ha) that encompassed the site of the Burnham House (Baublitz et al. 2006). By 1743, Thomas had died, passing the property, known as “Noxon’s Adventure” to his son Benjamin (Figure 8). In 1768 Benjamin drafted an agreement to sell Noxon’s Adventure to Samuel Burchard, but prior to the execution of that agreement, both men died intestate. It is likely, based upon an evaluation of Benjamin’s estate in 1779, that the first structures erected on this property and inhabited by Thomas Noxon and his family included a log dwelling and several associated outbuildings (New Castle County Orphans Court case files [NCCOC], Benjamin Noxon, Esq. 1779–1819). Samuel Burchard was not referenced in Noxon’s case files, but may have been living on the Noxon tract at that time. Burchard died a short time before May 1787, and his estate was inventoried by a neighboring farmer, Cornelius Armstrong. The inventory lists fields in wheat and rye, several horses, mares and a colt, sows and hogs, sheep and lambs, calves, heifers, and cows, and some poultry, among other farming implements and household items (New Castle County Probate Records, Samuel Burchard 1787–1807).

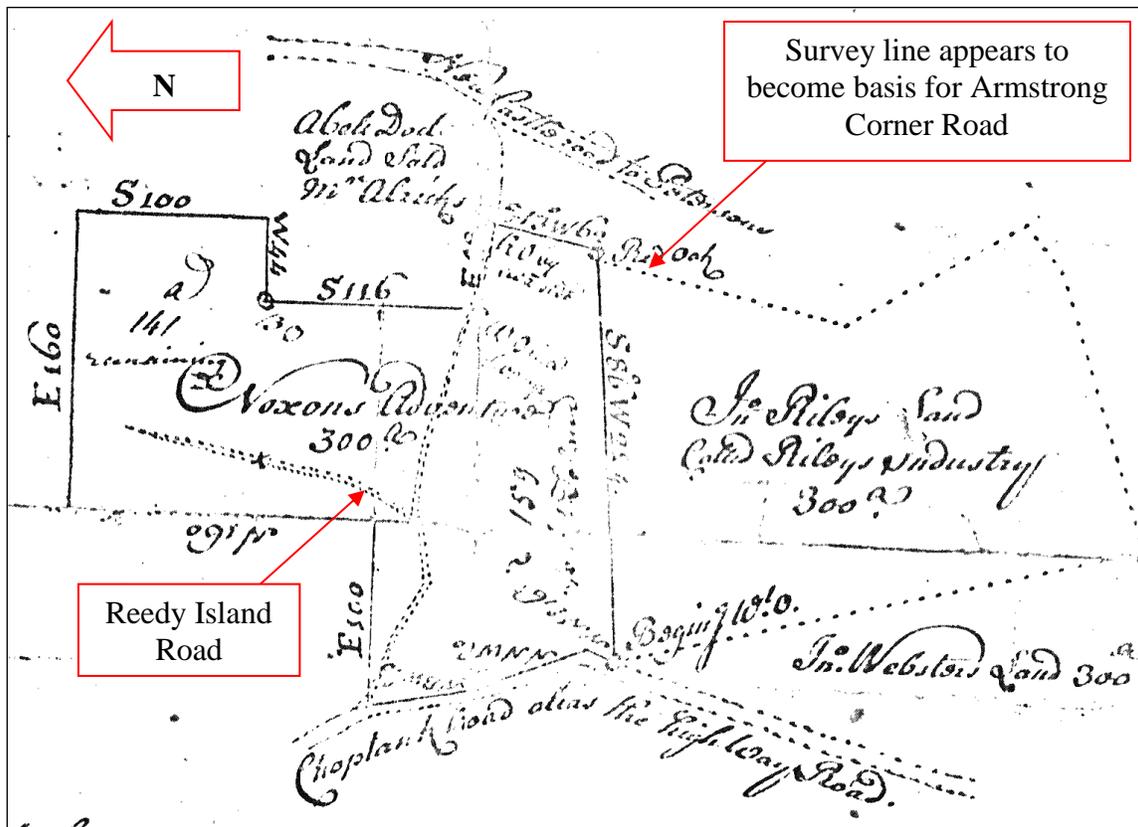


Figure 8: 1771 Re-Survey by Peter Hyatt of Noxon’s Adventure (New Castle County Warrants and Surveys, B2 #131).

The exact location of any buildings from this period, or if archaeological remains still exist, is unknown because the Orphan's Court evaluation describes two farmsteads belonging to Noxon's estate in St Georges Hundred with no additional locational information. While there were almost certainly buildings located on the 300-acre (121.41 ha) tract, this survey uncovered no evidence of their existence within the project area.

Early Industrialization (1770–1830)

The American Revolution brought disarray to the region, and social and political unrest in Delaware further heightened an already tense atmosphere. Strong family and political ties to Pennsylvania resulted in support for the Revolutionaries. Only one Revolutionary War battle was fought in Delaware, at Cooch's Bridge near Scottsborough in 1777, during the campaign that led to the Battle of Brandywine. After the Battle of Brandywine, British troops occupied Wilmington and threatened the state capital at New Castle. The capital was moved to Dover, and this became Delaware's permanent capital in 1781.

The War of 1812 similarly avoided the state, but its economic impacts were felt in a series of embargoes which negatively affected trade. Depleting soil quality and competition from new lands in the West impacted industry. From 1800 to 1830, agricultural productivity in Delaware decreased markedly and many farmers were forced to sell their land and move to the state's industrial centers to find employment (Frederick et al. 2006:59). To fight decreased soil fertility and improve agriculture, the farmers of New Castle County established the state's first agricultural society in 1804 (Frederick et al. 2006:59). Meanwhile, manufacturing and commerce prospered as the state's population increased. Textiles, paper, snuff, rope, gunpowder, and iron were all produced in New Castle County (Coxe 1814).

The economic depression of 1819, brought on by low prices of wheat and other grains, further decreased the value of agricultural land and crops across the state. During this period, the most successful agrarians became part of central Delaware's rural elite farming class and diversified their interests by purchasing urban properties, investing in banks and manufacturing facilities, and supporting the growth of transportation networks (Siders et al. 1991). Members of this elite class promoted scientific farming and agricultural reform, advocating the enclosure of farmland and use of new machinery, constructing new farm buildings, increasing livestock production, and controlling patterns of land tenancy (Siders et al. 1993:10).

The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal (C&D Canal) was opened to traffic in 1829, connecting the Chesapeake Bay with the Delaware River and providing improved market access for area farmers and industrialists (Frederick et al. 2006:62). Overland transportation routes were constructed and improved at this time to accommodate increased numbers of travelers and facilitate trade. Armstrong Corner Road, located south of the Burnham House site, is seen on historic maps of the area as early as 1820 and was partially detailed in an early road survey dating to 1802 (New Castle County Road Papers).

Despite the social, political, and economic changes taking place during this period, the ownership and conveyance of the Burnham House parcel was relatively stable. During this 60-year period, Samuel Burchard and his heirs obtained and maintained ownership of that portion of Noxon's Adventure which they sought to purchase from Benjamin Noxon in 1768 (Figure 9). Title to 187 acres (75.68 ha) of Noxon's Adventure was given to Samuel Burchard's heirs in 1798, completing the agreement their fathers had come to three decades earlier (Baublitz et al. 2006). As illustrated by the property survey, Noxon's heirs used what was then referred to as Old Reedy Island Road as the northern boundary of this tract. The 1797 Direct Tax of St. Georges Hundred assessed Samuel Burchard's estate of 150 acres (60.70 ha) (100 acres (40.47 ha) improved and 50 acres (20.23 ha) unimproved) with a house and kitchen valued at \$375, reflecting a fairly under-developed farmstead at that time, and also indicating that no rent was collected from the farm that year. Neighbor Thomas Bird was listed with 139 acres (56.25 ha) (90 acres (36.42 ha) improved, 49 acres (19.83) unimproved), a house, kitchen, barn, corn crib, stable, and carriage house valued at \$675.

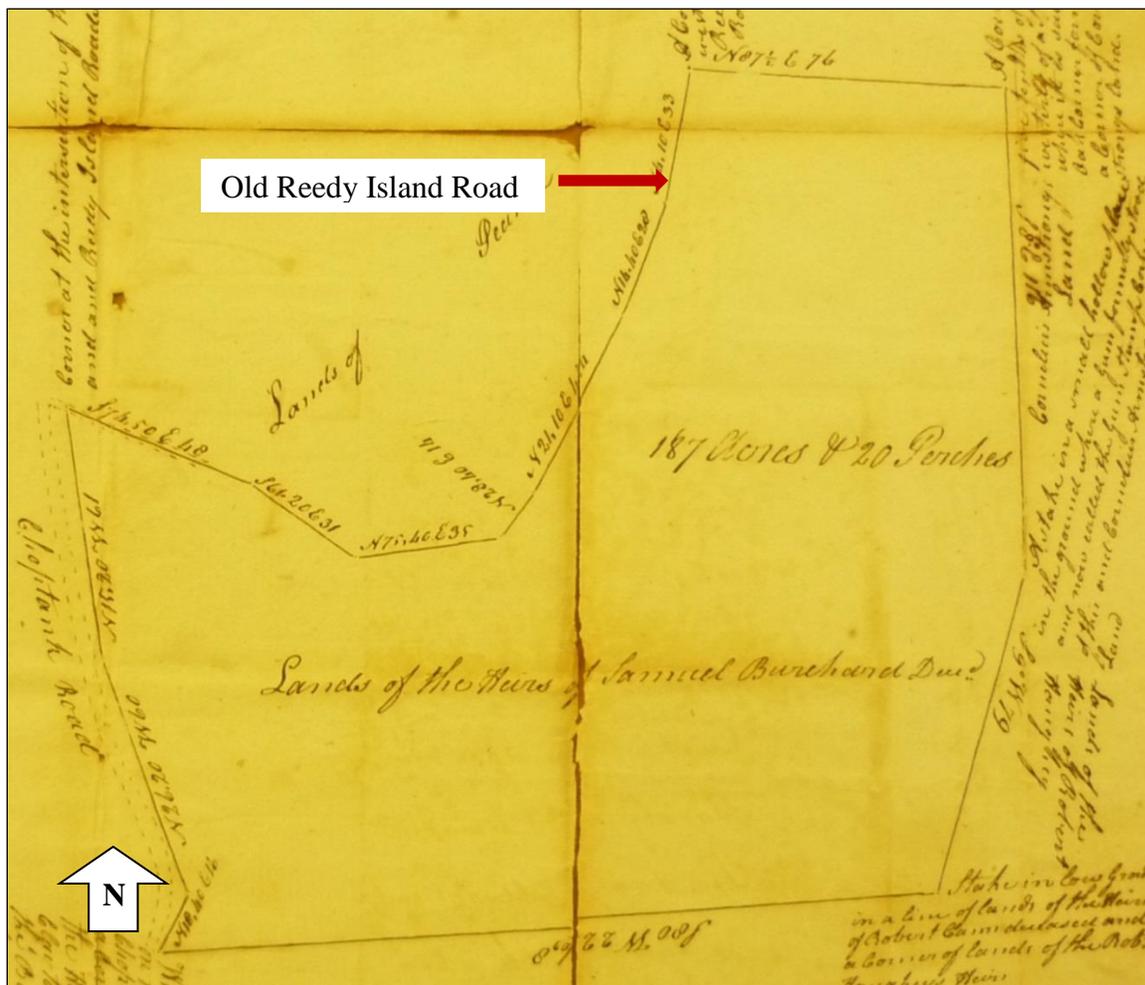


Figure 9: New Castle County Orphans Court Survey for the Heirs of Samuel Burchard, 1799 (On File at the Delaware Public Archives).

As the eldest son, Isaac Burchard received two shares of his father's property, which he immediately conveyed to Thomas Burnham, husband of Isaac's sister, Joanna, who also possessed one share in their father's tract. Burnham petitioned for the division of Burchard's estate in May 1799, and described the land as containing "a dwelling house, out house and other improvements..." at that time (NCCOC, Samuel Burchard 1799–1800). Rather than divide the land, Thomas and Joanna Burnham succeeded in buying out or otherwise acquiring the remaining shares of the property before Thomas's death in 1802 (Baublitz et al. 2006). An 1802 survey conducted in response to John A. Pennington's petition for a road in St. Georges Hundred depicts Thomas Burnham's dwelling house in greater detail (Figure 10).

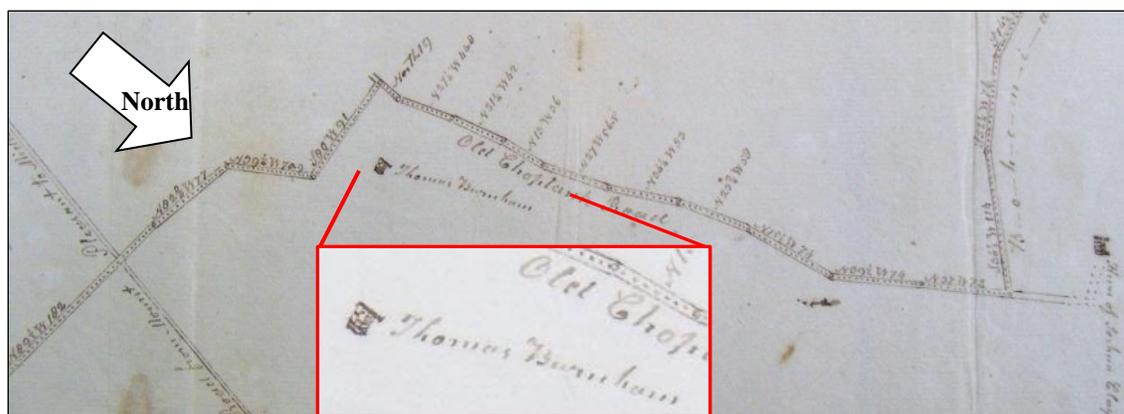


Figure 10: Detail of 1802–1803 Petition of John A. Pennington, St. Georges Hundred, New Castle County Road Papers (On File at Delaware Public Archives).
Detail of building inset.

According to tax assessments, Thomas and Joanna Burnham appear to have been living in Pecander Hundred when he passed away, likely renting out the site under study. In 1806, tax assessments indicate that Joanna moved from Pecander to St. Georges Hundred, with the 1810 Census recording 11 people in her household (Ancestry.com [Ancestry]). The 1816–1817 tax assessment listed 183 acres (74.1 ha) associated with Thomas Burnham's estate, 90 acres (36.42 ha) improved and 93 acres (37.64 ha) in woodland, along with a "wood dwelling, barn, stable, and outhouses" valued at \$2,196. Joanna Burnham retained ownership of the property as a single woman and widow until her death around 1842, but it is not clear how long she resided there.

Industrialization and Capitalization (1830–1880)

In northern Delaware, the Industrial Revolution led to significant advances in transportation, urbanization, and industrialization. In the 1840s, the Pennsylvania, Washington and Baltimore Railroad connected Newport to Wilmington, and a branch line connected New Castle to Delaware Junction. The railroad and the newly constructed C&D Canal allowed farmers and merchants increased opportunities to ship their products to markets in the eastern urban areas and abroad. As eastern urban centers grew and farming techniques improved, agriculture in Delaware expanded to include the

production of perishable dairy goods, fruits, and vegetables for these markets. Manufacturing in the state grew as well, with roughly 380 factories reported in Delaware at the start of the Civil War, many specializing in brick-making, milling, and canning (Frederick et al. 2006:65).

As a border state, Delaware was politically divided and not physically impacted by military conflict during the Civil War, but played an important role in the Underground Railroad, with several “stations” located across the state. Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, many African-Americans came to Delaware from the South in search of economic opportunity (Frederick et al. 2006:74). This emigration of labor worked with the expansion of agriculture and industry to create an economic boom following the war. Delaware farmers were at the center of this growth and demonstrated their financial success through substantial improvements to their farm properties. Numerous families in St. Georges Hundred erected new farmsteads with sizable dwellings, barns, and outbuildings (Herman et al. 1985).

The parcel under study stayed within the Burnham family during this time, passing through three generations. Joanna Burnham retained ownership of the property as a single woman and widow until her death, but it is not clear how long she resided there. Sometime between 1830 and 1840, Joanna moved in with her second son, James H. Burnham, when she was in her late seventies and early eighties (Ancestry). Joanna Burnham died in the early 1840s, prior to the September 1843 petition of her eldest son, Samuel, to the Orphans Court to settle her estate for the benefit of several grandchildren. The ensuing plat shows more than 186 acres (75.27 ha) of land and two one-story dwellings along Old Reedy Island Road (“inclosed”), among other attributes (NCCOC, Joanna Burnham 1842–1844) (Figure 11, p. 25). The property was valued at \$2,000, with the interest of other heirs soon after obtained by the petitioner, Samuel Burnham.

Samuel Burnham did not live on the farm, but continued to pay taxes on the property until his death around 1871, when the land passed to his son, John. A Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance policy on the property, taken out on January 13, 1873, covered “a New 2 Story Frame Dwelling Situated on his farm in St. Georges Hundred about 2 ½ miles from Middletown” for \$2,100. Also “a Frame Granary & Carriage House \$275, Frame Barn \$300, Meat House & Poultry House (each \$50), Contents of Granary Viz Corn \$300, Wheat \$250, Peach Baskets \$250.” What is believed to be a depiction of this “New House” appeared on the 1868 *Atlas of the State of Delaware* map (Pomeroy and Beers 1868) (Figure 12, p. 26). This “new house” is presumably the building known as the Burnham House and the subject of this report.

John Burnham owned at least three farm properties by the time he died from complications of tuberculosis in 1879, leaving his widow, Elizabeth Van Leuveneigh Bird Burnham, to take charge of the estate for their minor children—only one of which lived to adulthood. The family appears to have spent most of their time at Amstel House in New Castle; however, the farm remained affiliated with Samuel Burnham in later maps of the area, including G. M. Hopkins’ 1881 map and Baist’s 1893 map of St. Georges Hundred (Figure 13 and Figure 14, p. 27).

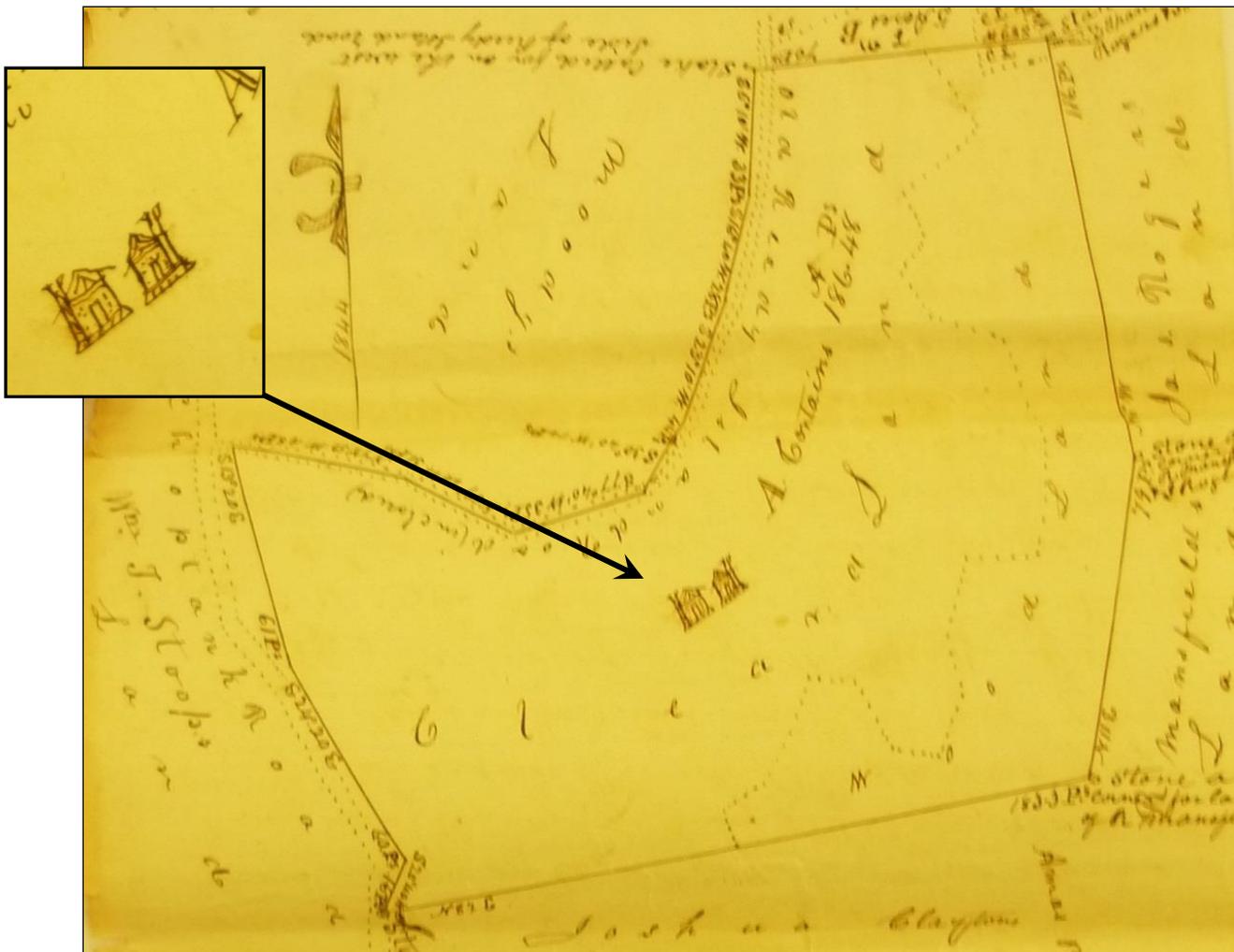


Figure 11: Orphans Court Survey for the Heirs of Joanna Burnham, 1844
(On File at the Delaware Public Archives). Detail of buildings inset.

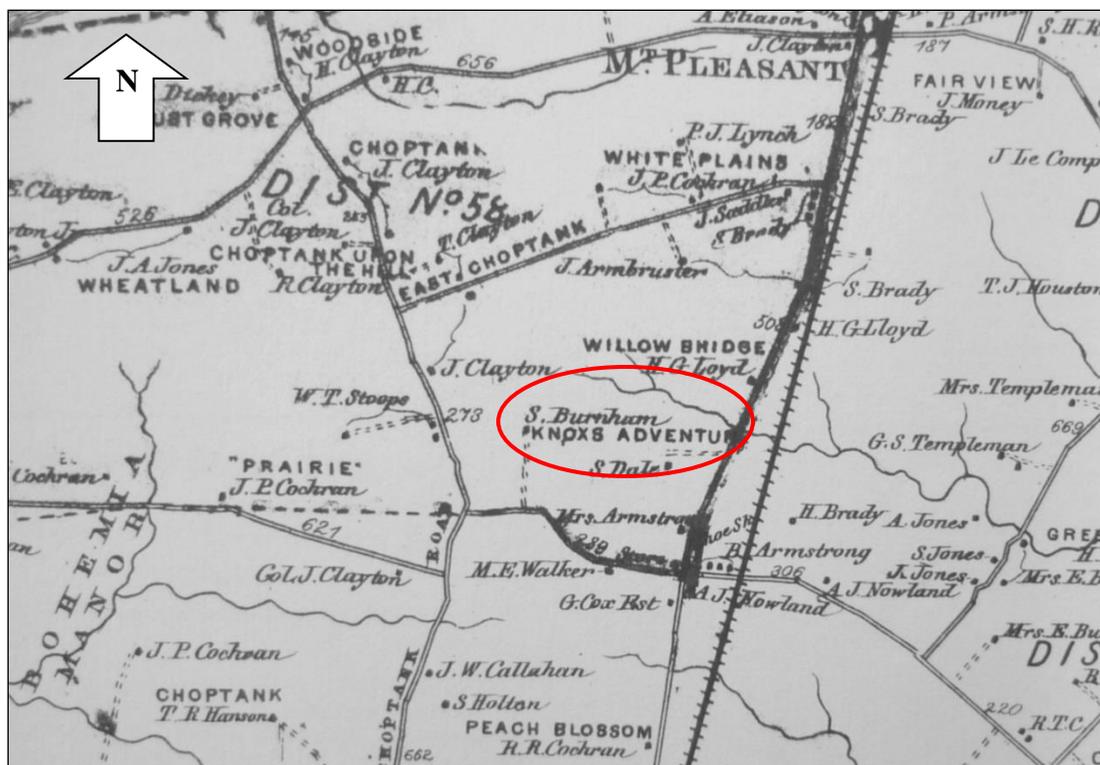


Figure 12: Pomery and Beers Atlas of St. Georges Hundred, 1868
(On File at the Delaware Public Archives). Note “Knox’s Adventure”
below “S. Burnham.”

Urbanization and Suburbanization (1880–1940)

An increase in Delaware’s population in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century led to an urban expansion as immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe settled in Delaware cities and towns. Nearly 70 percent of New Castle County’s population in the early 1900s lived in Wilmington (Kellogg 1990:32). Reflecting a larger trend in population across the country, more people resided in the cities than ever, aided by increased transportation opportunities and the automobile age. Construction of T. Colman DuPont’s concrete highway, known as US Route 13, allowed farmers, merchants, and residents to traverse the state more easily. Constructed in 1923 and open to traffic by 1924, this roadway stretched from Wilmington, at the north end of the state, south to the Delaware-Maryland state line (Frederick et al. 2006:79).

Transportation improvements and the growth of manufacturing during this period encouraged farmers to industrialize as increased mechanization began to fill a growing labor shortage. Agriculture in the state continued to be diverse, though rising urban populations fostered growth in the number of dairy, poultry, and truck farming operations (Frederick et al. 2006:77). Large farms became corporations producing goods specifically for markets in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and other urban areas.



Figure 13: G. M. Hopkins Map of St. Georges Hundred, 1881
(On File at Historical Society of Delaware).



Figure 14: Baist Map of St. Georges Hundred, 1893
(On File at Delaware Public Archives).

Population expansion in the state's urban areas continued throughout the period, bringing new concerns to towns regarding sewer service, water supply, and other infrastructure. Urban growth spread out from Wilmington, encroaching on surrounding farmland. By the end of this period, the pattern and density of settlement in Delaware had developed into suburban clusters at the edges of urban communities and in close proximity to highways

(Frederick et al. 2006:80). Scattered commercial development grew in response to residents' increased reliance on the automobile, particularly along well-traveled highways, resulting in the construction of gas stations, motels, diners, and roadside stands across the state.

The decades of urbanization and expansion in Delaware did little to affect the rural nature of the Burnham House site since the land remained undivided. However, this period did see major changes in the ownership of the property as it passed out of the Burnham family to two different families in succession. John Bird Burnham, the only surviving child of John and Elizabeth, became a well-known sportsman and proponent of federal legislation to protect migratory birds in the early 1900s. John B. Burnham appears to have spent much of his life in New York, particularly on the farm in Willsboro, New York, "which he operated as a Highlands Game Preserve" (Historical Society of Delaware Genealogy files, Burnham family folder). John B. Burnham sold the property out of the family for the first time in over a century to Schee Lockwood in 1901 (NCCDBS18:562). Tax records from 1905–1908 assess Lockwood with "140 acres with frame house, granary, & Stable," valued at \$4,765, 47 acres (19.02 ha) of "Branch" valued at \$235, and a tenement valued at \$50.

Before long, the property was sold again after Lockwood's wife had him declared mentally insane in 1912, and they defaulted on their loan less than a year later. In 1913, the 187-acre (75.7-ha) Burnham farm was purchased by Ezra Evans, a 57-year-old general farmer, for \$3,250 (NCCDB T24:29). In 1920, Evans' tax assessment reports, "148 acres with frame house & barn, 36 acres swamp, 9 acres lowland." It is likely that the renovations seen archaeologically around the Burnham House landscape dating to the early-twentieth century were undertaken by Ezra Evans after his purchase of the property. After his death in 1927, the farm passed to his wife, Rose. Upon Rose's death in 1931, she left the property to her son, Thomas Arthur Evans, who owned the property until the early 1950s.

Recent History (1940–present)

After World War II, suburban and commercial development spread across New Castle County, altering the land use patterns and landscape of the region. This type of growth began in Wilmington and radiated outwards, affecting the towns of Newark and New Castle, and eventually spilling into the county's countryside. Although production levels increased, the number of people and amount of land involved in the state's agricultural industry declined. Suburban growth and increasing operational costs encouraged many farmers to sell their land to development companies (Frederick et al. 2006:85).

Planned suburban communities spread as improved roadways and an increase in employment brought more traffic into the state's rural areas. Significant transportation developments include the improvement of existing transportation corridors as well as the construction of Interstate 95 (I-95) and SR 1 providing faster travel routes across the state. During this period the railroads declined, but large manufacturing companies, such as DuPont and Chrysler, built substantial operations in Delaware to service people worldwide.

The past 70 years of history at the Burnham Farm site have been defined by numerous owners, land division, and the ultimate destruction of the dwelling built in the late 1860s (See appendix B: chain of title, p. 91). Currently, the property is owned by the State of Delaware, and at the time of survey, contained only ruins of a residence and farmstead. The house was in poor condition when it was first surveyed in 1977, but remained visible on historic aerials into the early 1990s. Aerial images dating from 1937 to 1961 reveal an active farmstead, however, land around the house was overgrown and wooded by 1992 (Figure 15 and Figure 16, p. 30). Aerial photographs reveal that the house burned sometime between 1992 and 1997.



Figure 15: 1937 Aerial Image of Burnham House Property, Then Owned by Ezra and Rose Evans (CHRIS 2011).

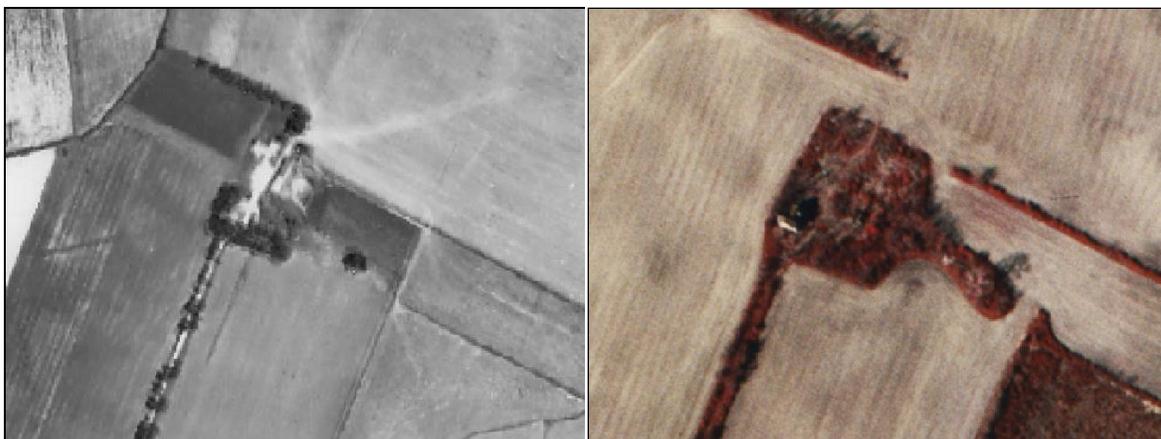


Figure 16: At Left, Burnham House Circa 1961, and Circa 1992 at Right (CHRIS 2011).

Previous Surveys

While not surveyed until 2006, the Burnham House was recorded in 1988 through a series of photographs (Appendix A, Figure 66–Figure 70, pp. 88–90). These five black and white images, curated by the DE Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, show the Burnham House in a state of disrepair. Despite the condition of the building, however, these photographs show clear evidence of the construction methods and style of the building prior to its burning sometime in the 1990s. Additionally, close inspection of the images reveals evidence of remains of some of the supporting structures including the windmill and a possible outbuilding.

A Phase IA survey that identified the Burnham House site was conducted by A.D. Marble and Company in 2006 as part of a project to create an archaeological predictive model to be used in conjunction with the Route 301 project. During the course of this project, archaeologists from A.D. Marble cleared vegetation from the farmstead ruins, then photographed and mapped the architectural remains (Baublitz et al. 2006). The Burnham House foundation, the foundation for Structure 4 (an outbuilding), Structure 5 (the windmill), and Structure 6 (a standing frame shed) were identified and recorded (Note: Structured numbers were assigned by Dovetail during the current investigations and not by A.D. Marble in 2006). Additionally, a detailed drawing of the Burnham House foundation was completed, as well as a site plan showing the location and relationships between the identified structures.

The Phase IA report for the Burnham House also included a history of the site, including a chain of title dating from 1734 to the present. While previous surveys of the site seemingly did not assign a date to the Burnham House, the report by A.D. Marble concluded that the parcel had the potential to contain archaeological deposits dating from the eighteenth through the twentieth century, based upon their historical research. They also concluded that because there appeared to be no severe ground disturbance around the Burnham House and its supporting structures, the potential for significant archaeological resources was high. However, no subsurface investigations were conducted at that time.