

GENERAL HISTORY

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* defines the Upper Piedmont's geology and geography as a fairly consistent soil type and topography. Land-use is dominated by both Dover and outlying rural economies.

The soils in this zone range from medium-textured to moderately coarse, with some areas being well-drained and others very poorly drained. The subsoil consists of sandy loam or sandy clay loam. Land contours range from level through gently rolling to steep.... Originally, the entire area was full of waterways. Many of the large creeks and rivers that flowed into the Delaware River were navigable by small boats for a fair distance inland. In addition, numerous small streams drained into the larger creeks. Like those in the Piedmont Zone, these streams have been subject to heavy silting and deposition over the past three centuries and in most cases are no longer navigable except by canoe or rowboats.... The zone was also heavily wooded with a variety of trees: oak, hickory, poplar, walnut, ash. Indian corn grew wild in many areas, and the land was inhabited by a large range of animals. At the present time much of the zone is under cultivation for agriculture. Dover, the state's capital, is the only large town in the zone, but there are many smaller communities (Ames et al. 34).

While the geography of the portion of Dover within the APE reflects earlier agricultural land-use, the project area is primarily reflective of the theme of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (as defined in the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*). The APE features a number of property types from the late-nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries, which are directly related to that theme.

Exploration and Frontier Settlement

The earliest explorations of Delaware occurred during the sixteenth century when Spanish and Portuguese merchants charted portions of the state's coastline. Henry Hudson and Cornelius Hendricksen later followed them, the former in 1609 and the latter in 1614, establishing a Dutch presence in the southern part of Delaware. The first recorded Dutch settlement occurred in 1631 near present-day Lewes. Thirty settlers under the auspices of a Dutch East Indies Trading Company erected a settlement, named Zwaanendael, on the west bank of the Lewes Creek. Native Americans destroyed the small settlement in 1632 and European colonization in this area came to a standstill until 1658 when the Dutch, intending to secure the region, erected a settlement called Hoerekill.

At the same time that Dutch settlement was occurring in southern Delaware, Swedish settlement began to occur in northern Delaware. In 1638, a group of Swedish settlers established a colony in present-day Wilmington. The settlement, known as Fort Christiana, was erected at the confluence of the Christiana and Brandywine Rivers. After the construction of the log fort, a village known as Christineham was established (Thomas, Regensburg and Basalik II-1). Control of the area would oscillate between the Dutch and Swedish during the next seventeen years. During the eighteenth century, Christineham was joined to the village of Willingtown (Wilmington). Appointed by Queen Christiana, Colonel Johan Prinz served as Governor of New Sweden from 1643 to 1653.

In 1651, Peter Stuyvesant purchased a tract of land from the Lenapi, which had been sold to the Swedes. Believing the land to be under Dutch ownership, Stuyvesant erected Fort Casmir and the village of New Amstel, at present-day New Castle. Three years later in 1654, Prinz's successor, Johan Rising, seized Fort Casmir, renaming it Fort Trinity. Though the Lenapi confirmed Swedish ownership of the west bank of the Delaware River, the Dutch sent Stuyvesant back in 1655 to recapture the fort from the Swedish. On August 31, 1655, Stuyvesant succeeded and Fort Casmir was returned to the Dutch. In addition, the Swedes were driven from both banks of the Delaware River. Fort Christiana was captured two weeks later and the territory remained under Dutch control until 1663 when the Dutch West India Company transferred rights to land along the Delaware to King Charles II of England. Charles granted the tract, which extended from south of Christiana Creek to Bombay Hook - to James, Duke of York in 1644 (Scharf). Desiring a British territory for British subjects, the Duke drove the Dutch from the region and changed the name of New Amstel to New Castle.

Although the Dutch briefly recaptured the territory in 1673, the English regained control by 1681. The following year, the Duke of York granted the land to William Penn to annex to the Province of Pennsylvania. The grant consisted of the counties of New Castle, St. Jones, and Deale, known as the Lower Three Counties. Soon after, Penn renamed St. Jones County and Deale County, Kent and Sussex respectively.

Delaware continued to be the subject of territorial disputes well into the eighteenth century. A lengthy dispute had erupted between Lord Baltimore of Maryland and William Penn concerning the boundaries of their respective Provinces. This dispute continued between their heirs until the Mason-Dixon Line was established in the 1760s. In 1776, Delaware declared itself not only independent of English rule but also separated itself from Pennsylvania to form its own state. In 1787, when the U.S. Constitution was submitted to the states, Delaware became the first of the thirteen original states to ratify the Constitution at a convention in Dover.

From its first settlements in the seventeenth century until the late-nineteenth century, northern Delaware was the state's chief economic region, with Wilmington serving as the major economic center. The regional economy diversified to include shipbuilding, milling, coopering, and shipping. In contrast, southern Delaware has remained primarily agricultural.

Originally called St. Jones County, Kent County's first recorded land transactions occurred in 1671 with the sale of 5,300 acres, which were divided into ten sites on or near the lower part of the St. Jones River. Later patents ranged from 200 acres to 2,000 acres with the median being 400-500 acres (Jackson 10).

Kent County was renamed and re-chartered by William Penn in 1683. Realizing the need for a courthouse and town within the county, Penn ordered a court town to be laid out and a courthouse built. Acting on Penn's orders, the Provincial Council purchased 200 acres in Dover from William Southbee between 1694 and 1695. The courthouse was built by 1697 and a small village developed around it. The town of Dover, however, was not officially laid out until 1717.

Intensified and Durable Occupation

By 1775, Dover's boundaries had expanded and the residential section was now bounded by North Street, South Street, High Street (now called Governor's Avenue), and East Street. During the Revolutionary War, the council decided to move the state capital to Dover from New Castle, which they believed was endangered by the British forces. Chosen for both its distance from

northern Delaware and the English forces and the fact that it served as the county seat for Kent County, Dover was established as the new state capital in 1777.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Dover, like Kent County, remained primarily agricultural with an economy supported by sustenance farming. Though incorporated in 1829 and with a growing populace, Dover did not experience an economic surge until the mid-nineteenth century with the coming of the Delaware Railroad. The railroad, chartered in 1854, was a subsidiary of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. With the advent of the railroad, local farmers now had larger markets for their grain, produce, and livestock and as a result, the earlier sustenance farms gave way to larger production farms (Anon. 16). In 1860, a depot was constructed in Dover and by 1868 the town's boundaries had expanded north to Division Street and south to South Street (Figure 2).

Early Industrialization

Dover's industrial growth and rise in population necessitated the development of a waterworks in 1881, an electric plant in 1902, and a sewer system in 1936. In 1929, the town of Dover was incorporated as a city, and its position as a state capitol continued to encourage growth. Dover grew in size with the addition of large industries, such as the International Latex Corporation, General Foods and the National Cup Company, as well as the 1941 Dover Air Force Base. The Base was closed in 1946 but reopened to support the Korean War in 1951. Dover's industrial growth primarily occurred outside of the city's historic core. The location of new employment sources, as well as the increasing availability of automobiles, spurred suburban development in the interwar and post-World War II eras. The City of Dover continued to annex former farmland in response to, and in anticipation of, increased suburban growth (Frucht 6).

Much of Delaware—and Dover's—twentieth-century suburbanization may be understood through its relationship to transportation improvements. In 1907, 313 cars were registered in Delaware, a figure, which had increased to 10,702 registered cars in 1917. In that year, the Delaware State Highway Department was organized with the goal of creating a unified statewide highway system. In 1919, the construction of U.S. Route 13 (known as the DuPont Parkway) parallel to the Delaware Railroad, spurred a new corridor of residential and commercial growth. In addition, the new roadway system changed agricultural modes of production as produce could be more readily shipped to urban markets (Frucht 3-4).



Figure 2. The project area is directly south of the highlighted area. D. G. Beers *Atlas of the State of Delaware, 1868*.

PROJECT AREA NARRATIVE HISTORY

The project area is situated in East Dover Hundred in the Upper Peninsula Zone, as defined in the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1999). Within this geographic zone, several temporal and contextual periods have been established to understand its history and development. The majority of the buildings present within the APE fit within the state's Urbanization and Early Suburbanization context, which spans the approximate period of 1880 through 1940 (Herman et al. 34).

However, there was earlier settlement along South Governor's Avenue, usually on farms or in crossroad hamlets (Figure 3). Part of the project area was originally part the southern portion of the "Brother's Portion" tract that extended to Puncheon Run. The tract was divided into parcels during the eighteenth century and sold to various farmers. Though Dover had established itself as

a primary economic center, the area south of South Street remained agricultural and was comprised of mid-sized farm parcels.

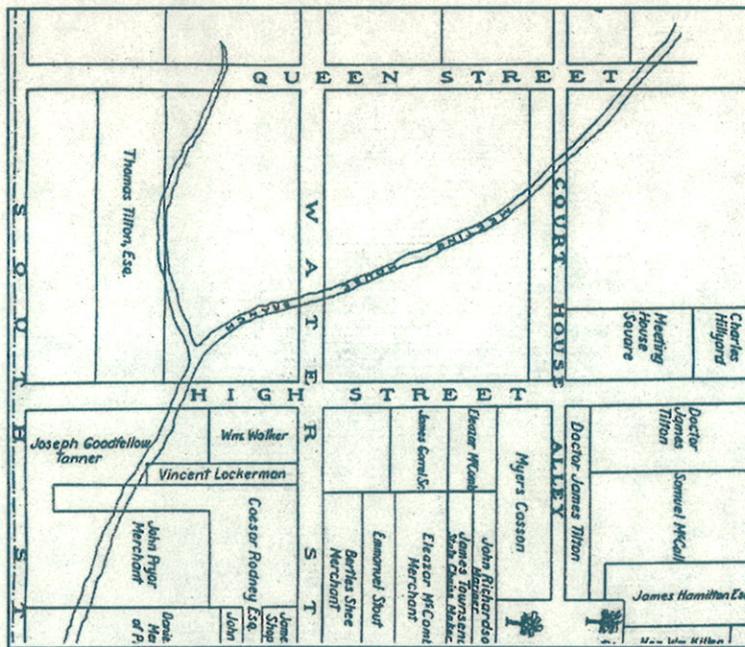


Figure 3. Early residential settlement patterns in the late eighteenth century were less dense in the project area. *Map of Dover Delaware in Revolutionary Times 1938.*

During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the northern end of Governor's Avenue was still called High Street. At this time, Dr. H. Ridgely owned nearly all the houses on Water Street east of High and most of the land on the opposite side. Outside of downtown Dover, however, the road configuration differed from today's alignment. Governor's Avenue extended only as far south as Hope Street, then moved over one block to the east to where today's Bradford Street is located. It existed to the south as part of the "road to Camden," which was later bypassed by U.S. 13. Just south of Puncheon Run, the road retains its original configuration. Prior to the completion of the rail line to Dover, Governor's Avenue was the primary southbound road, and was used as the stagecoach route for travel and limited commerce.

The economic and social trends, which dominated the early settlement on South Governor's Avenue centered on agricultural production. This reliance on farming is evidenced through a few remaining farmhouses and outbuildings and such institutions as the Grange (Figure 4). From the late-nineteenth into the early twentieth century, diversified farming for local markets and for shipment to markets accessible by rail began to dominate the economic landscape. Fruit orchards, in particular, grew in popularity and profitability due to new mechanized canning processes. The center and southern portions of the project area extend through three former nineteenth-century farms. North of Dover Street, the land was part of the M. Hayes Farm, the middle section, approximately between Dover Street and Wyoming Avenue was part of the Waples Farm, and the lower portion south of Wyoming Avenue was part of the Cooper Farm (Figure 5).

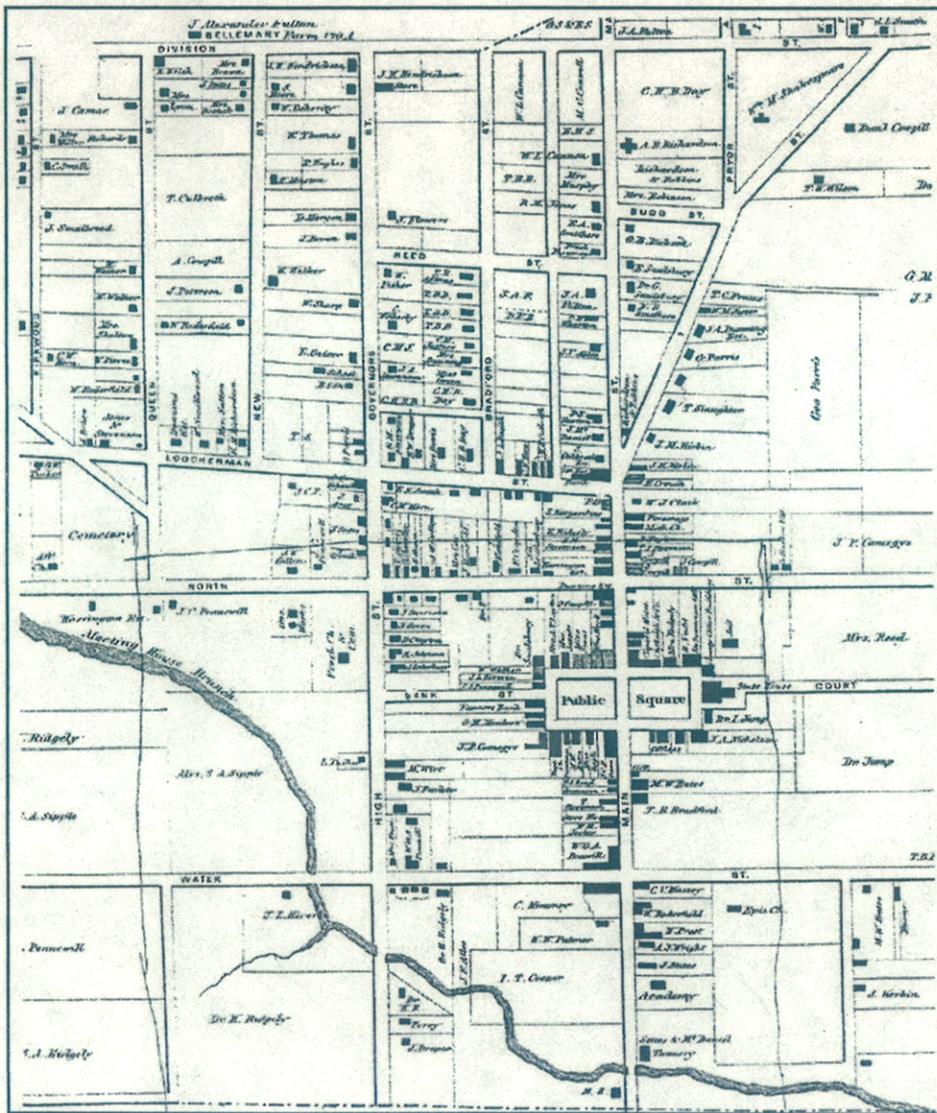


Figure 4. D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware*, 1868, which shows farms in areas south and west of Dover.

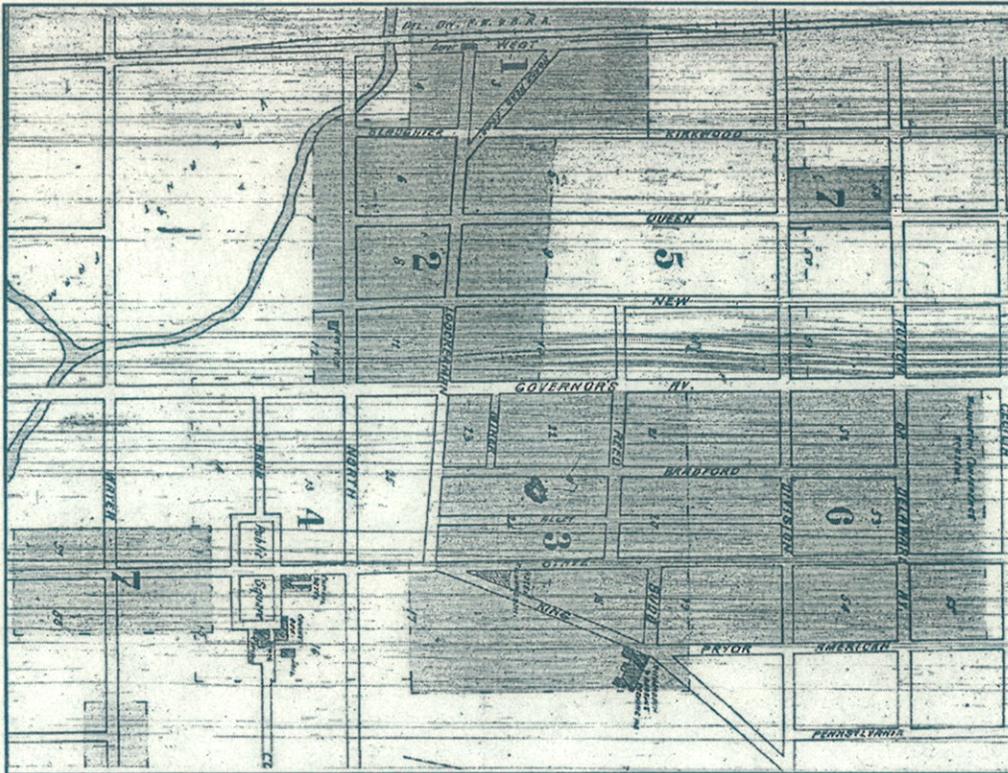


Figure 5. Sanborn Map, 1897. On file at Delaware State Archives.

Development along Governor's Avenue extended southward from downtown Dover over the years, but also centered on major intersections. By 1885, the road was lined with 1½- and two-story single-family frame dwellings and duplexes between Water and South Streets (as shown in Figure 6). A small crossroad hamlet, named Coopers Corner after the local landholders, was located near the split of Governor's Avenue and what is now Alternate 13. Mrs. Cooper owned the house just south of Puncheon Run on the west side of the road and another building north of Puncheon Run.

The dawning of the automobile age brought significant changes to the outlying areas surrounding cities such as Dover. Families were now able to live farther from the city and commute by car. This ability made suburbanization possible. Early suburbs were generally subdivided from a former farm and were often laid out on a grid plan.

The project area fits well within this context of the transition of agricultural lands to early suburbs. The extant buildings represent the typical forms, materials, and construction technologies of the late-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Together, they present a chronological image of the suburban development process that is common to many cities across the United States.

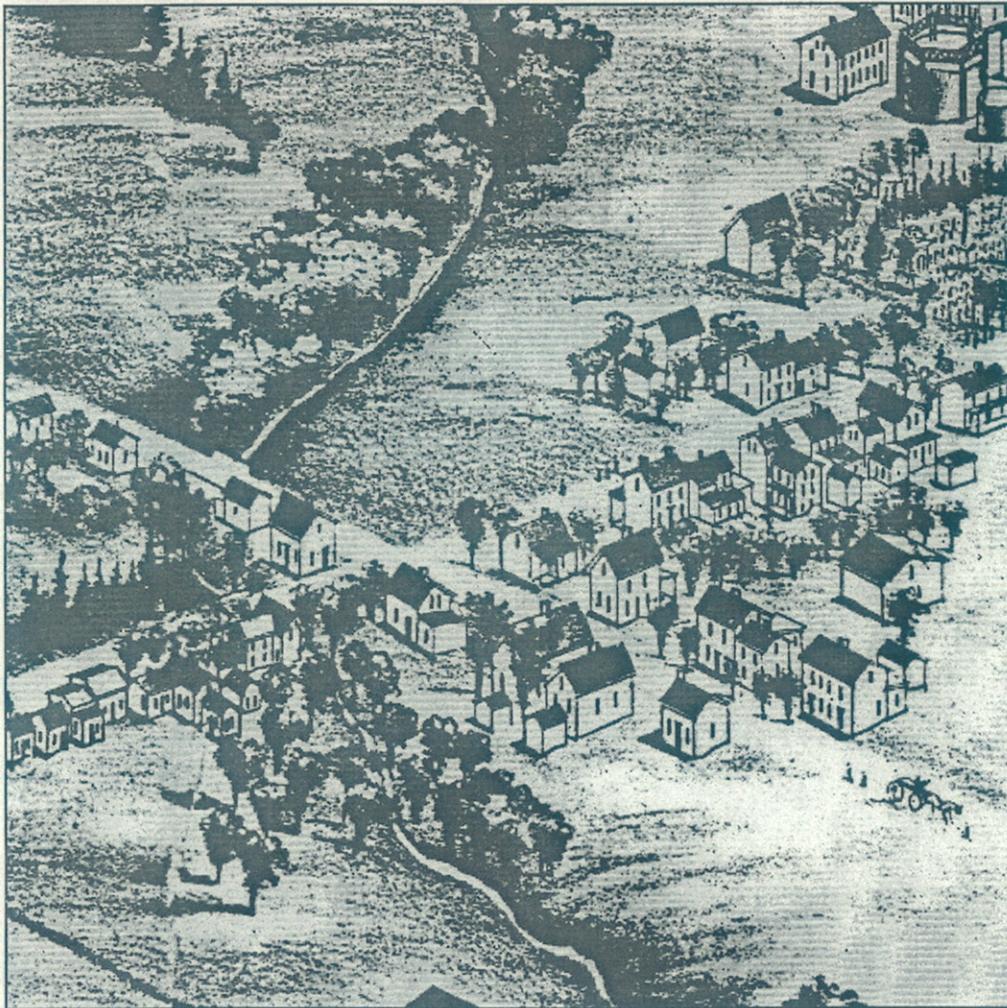


Figure 6. Governor's Avenue and Water Street, Perspective Map, 1885. On file at Delaware State Archives.

The project area saw major development of both residential and commercial properties during the period 1910-1940. During this time the Waples, Cooper, and Hayes Farms were all subdivided. The 1913 Waples Farm subdivision shows the typical early suburban plan of gridded streets and offered a variety of lot sizes to prospective buyers (Figure 7). In 1922, the southern portion of the Governor's Avenue was widened. Delaware State Highway Department plans from this year show that major landowners between Webbs Lane and Puncheon Run included the Cooper family, Gove Johnson, Frank Maloney, and Jacob Kesselring, who owned the land in the vicinity of today's Kesselring Avenue/Fiddler's Green. Peach orchards and vineyards dominated the landscape in the first decades of the twentieth century. The road widening may have come in response to the needs of these local farmers to transport their goods by truck to Dover markets, Dover's canneries, or to the train depot for shipment to long distance markets.

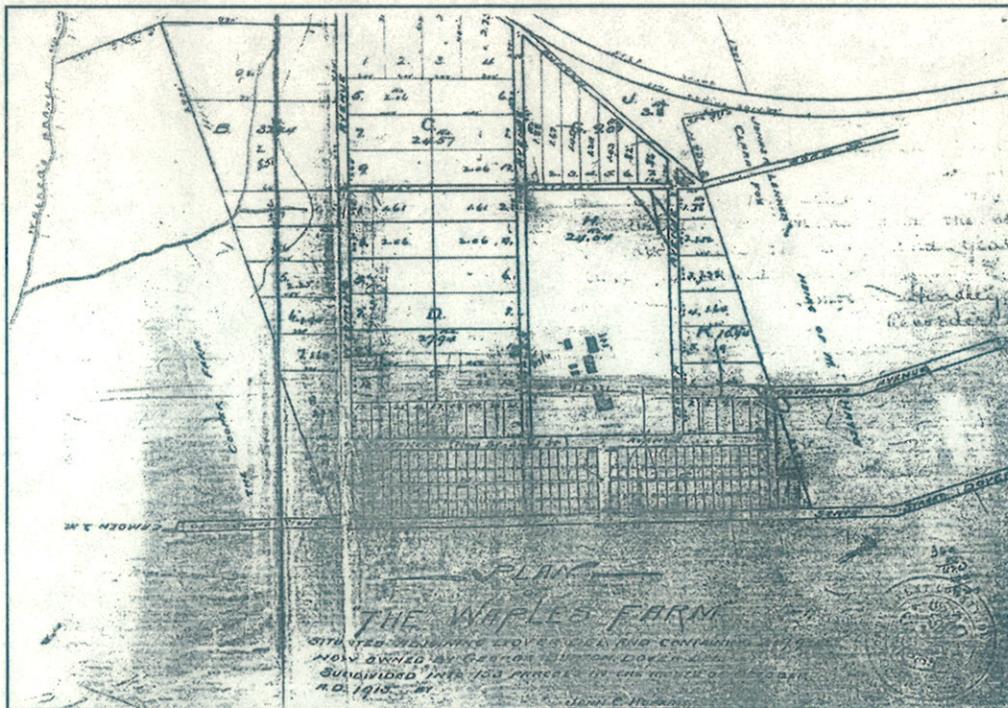


Figure 7. Waples Farm Subdivision, 1913. Hopkins, John C. *Plan of the Waples Farm*. Plat Book A, page 102. On file at the Kent County Recorder of Deeds Office.

An important early business was a lumber yard and concrete block manufactory located in the center of the block bounded by Governor's Avenue, Water Street, State Street, and South Street (Figures 8). This plant, in existence at least until 1929, may have provided building materials for the neighborhoods that developed to its south. Another important early presence in the project area is Kent General Hospital, located on the east side of Governor's Avenue between South and Hope Streets (Figure 9). The hospital was chartered in 1925 and the first building, a 40-bed unit, was built in 1927. The hospital was designed by architect William H. Thompson and built by the Bennett-McLaughlin Company of Philadelphia. The original hospital building has been expanded during several massive building campaigns and is now mostly obscured by modern edifices. Its presence, however, has greatly influenced the development of the area, as is evidenced by the numerous medically related businesses in the vicinity.

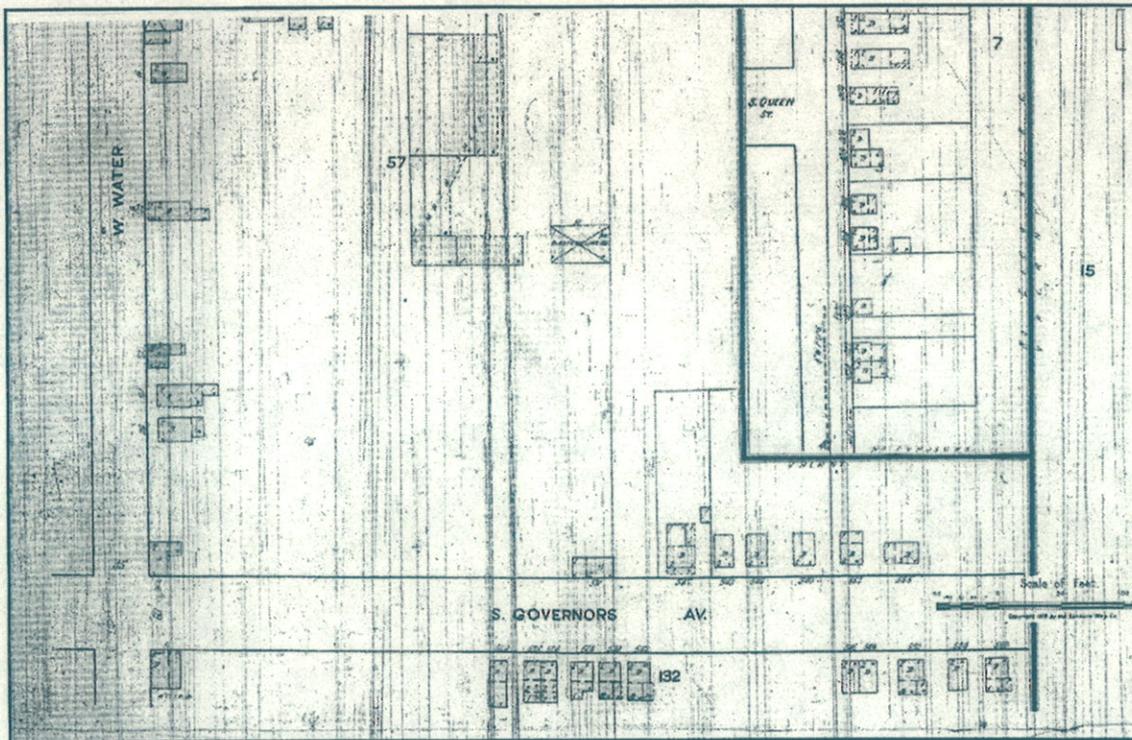


Figure 8 Sanborn Map, 1919. On file at Delaware State Archives. Note the presence of the lumberyard and the concrete block manufactory in the center of the map.

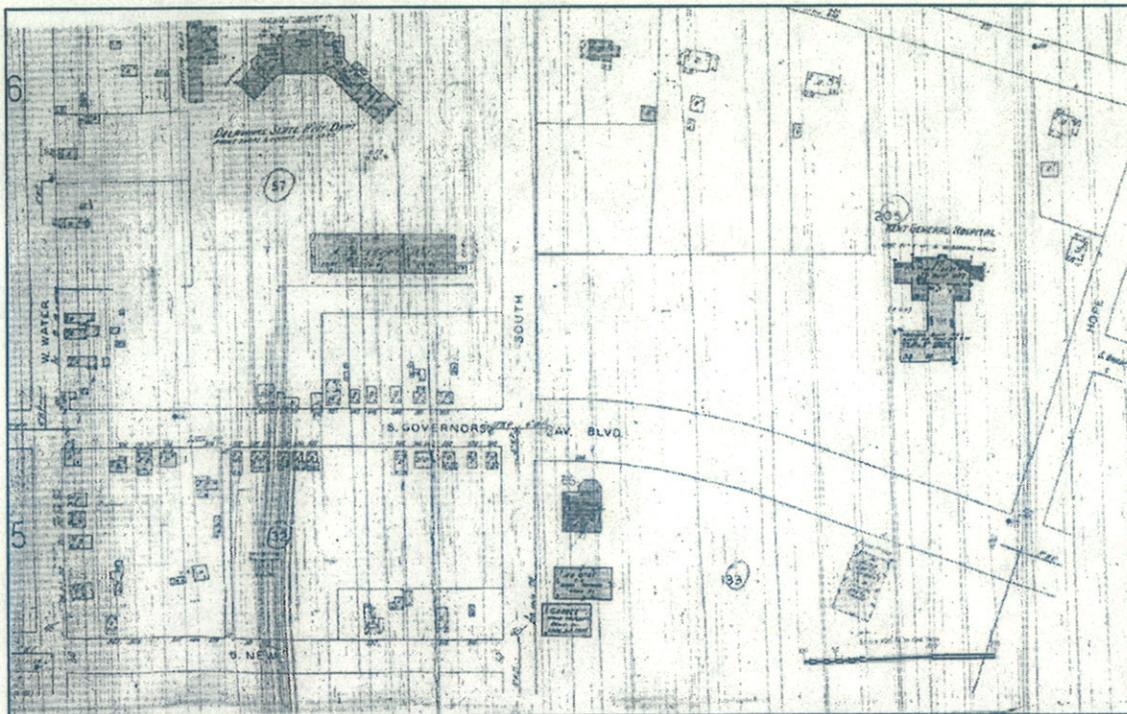


Figure 9. Sanborn Map, 1938. On file at Delaware State Archives. Note presence of Delaware State Highway Department in upper left-hand corner of map.

The portion of Governor's Avenue from South Street to just south of Puncheon Run was laid out in 1931 when the whole of Governor's Avenue was widened. Road plans from the early 1930s show that the block between Water Street and South Street was well established with a row of frame houses on either side of the street. South of South Street, however, remained rural. The new extension of Governor's Avenue cut through farmland such as J. J. Morris' apple orchards and vineyards north of Wyoming Avenue and through extensive peach orchards south of that. It was for this project that Bridge 3B was constructed to carry the Governor's Avenue extension over Puncheon Run. The bridge spanned eight feet and was constructed of reinforced concrete with paneled wing walls. Again, this road improvement likely benefited area truck farmers and enabled development further from the city center.

After the new road was built, development began to stretch southward away from Dover (as seen in Figures 9, 10, and 11). A State Highway Department complex near the project area was extant in 1938 (Figure 9). Residential construction occurred in the blocks between Waples and Wyoming Streets and throughout the blocks to the east. This suburban growth was made possible by the automobile, which enabled working class residents to commute into Dover to work. Commercial development was mainly concentrated at the northern end of the project area. Matthews Motor Company, known today as Matthews Pontiac, which was in existence as early as 1926 when it was located on Loockerman Street, moved to its current location at 600 South Governor's Avenue in 1936. Holden and Mundy Auto Dealers (today's Holden Dodge) was built at 640 South Governor's Avenue in 1944-45. The commercial building at 716-722 South Governor's Avenue dates to circa 1940-1945 and housed Mikell Motors and the Motorcar Service Company.

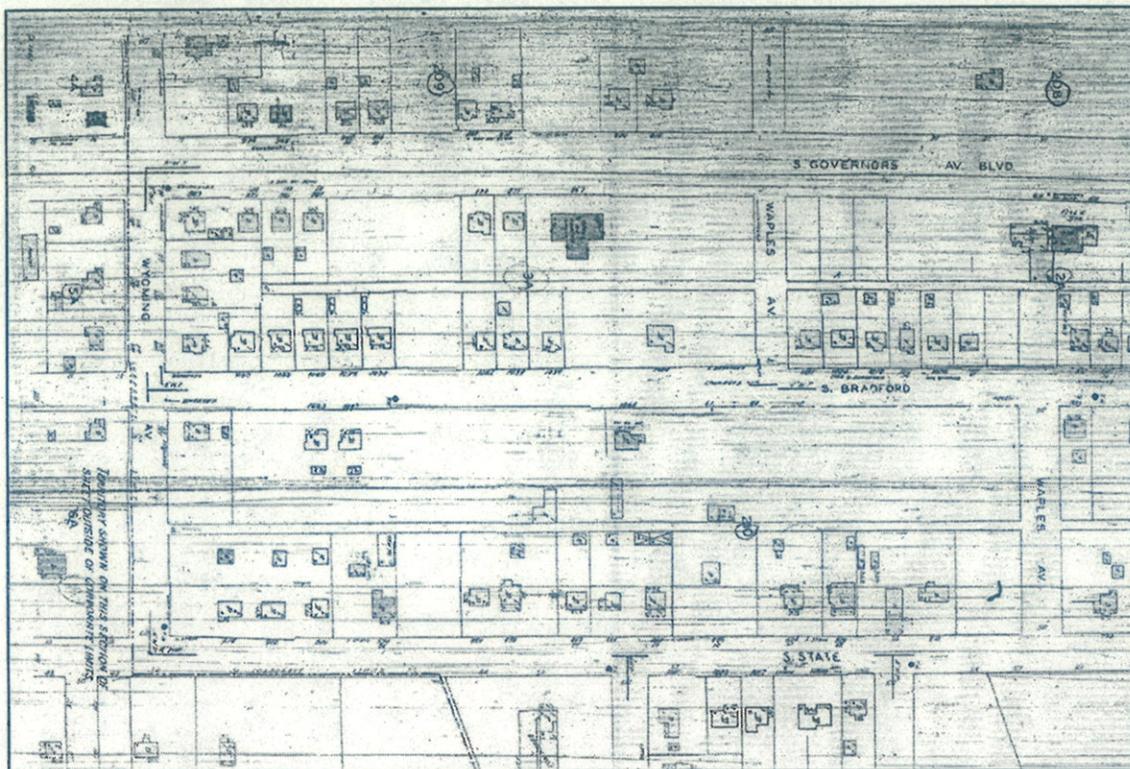


Figure 10. Sanborn Map, 1944. On file at Delaware State Archives.

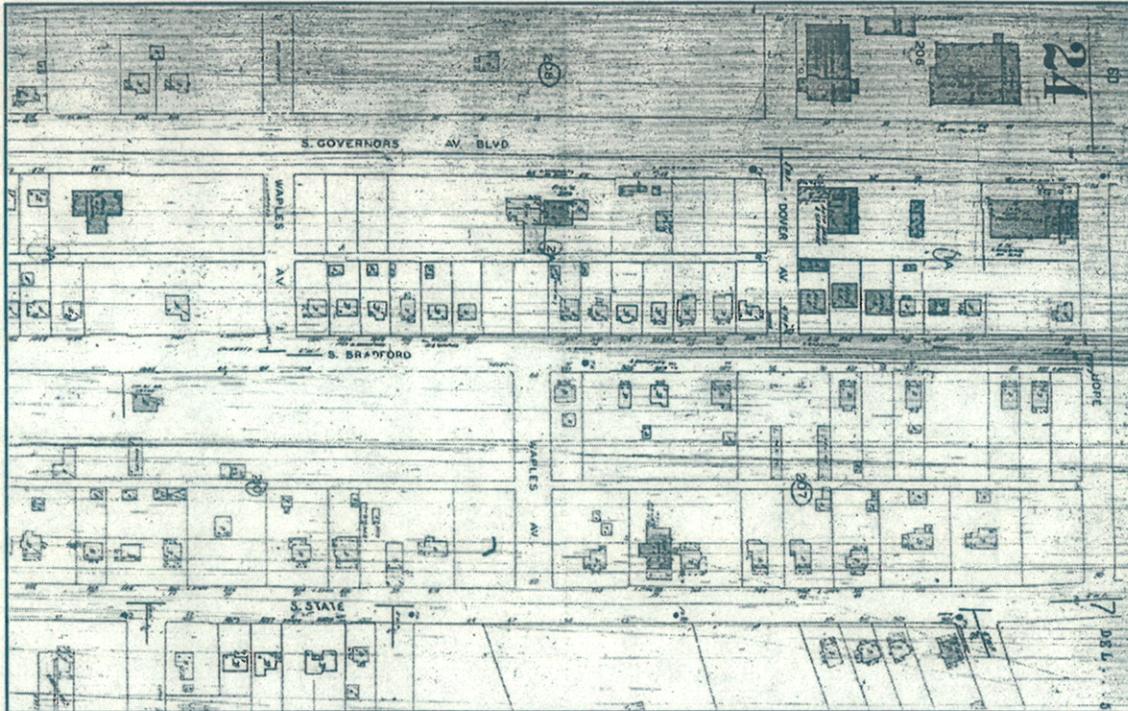


Figure 11. Sanborn Map, 1948. On file at Delaware State Archives.

Much of the development on South Governor's from South Street to Waples Avenue was oriented around the automobile-related business. Not only had the innovation made the residential development of the Waples Farm subdivision possible, it also created a demand for automobile sales and service facilities. The stretch of South Governor's Avenue from South Street to Waples Avenue was literally lined on both sides with automobile-related businesses. The 1948 Dover City Directory listed only a handful of non-automobile-related businesses among such enterprises as Matthews Motor Company, Holden and Mundy Auto Dealers, Mikell Motors, Motorcar Service Company, Biters Auto Service, Hamilton Service Station, the J & M Diner, Stubbs' Sinclair Service Station, and the Hillcrest Tourist Home. The diner and motel were examples of businesses that, while not directly involved in automobile sales or service, nonetheless catered to the industry by offering services aimed at automobile travelers.

A commercial mall on South Governor's Avenue (proximate to the project area), known as The Mall at Rodney Village, was one of the Dover area's earliest post-World War II shopping centers, and is associated with a residential subdivision, Rodney Village, which was completed in 1960 (Frucht 4).

In 1964, this automobile-centric economic base had expanded so that it included such businesses as Avenue Motors Gas Station, Imported Cars of Dover, Buchanan Service Automotive Equipment, Davis Auto Parts Company, Matthews Pontiac, Holden Dodge, Goodyear Service Station, S & S Motors Used Cars, Motorcar Service Wholesale Auto Suppliers, Mikell Auto Repair, Kent County Motors Garage, Capital Amoco, and Stubbs' Sinclair Station, and the J & M Diner all located within two blocks along South Governor's Avenue.

Another early presence in the project area was the Capital Grange, a chapter of the Delaware State Grange, which is a society dedicated to the promotion of farming and agricultural technology. The Capital Grange Hall was built in 1949-50 at 911 South Governor's Avenue and indicates the importance of agriculture in the area into the mid-twentieth century. The hall is currently used for Grange meetings and for other community groups and churches for meetings and services.

The development around the project area has been sporadic. Initially farmland, the area became more quickly settled after the introduction of the automobile in the early twentieth century and the attendant construction of new roads. In fact, many of the businesses in the area were founded because of the growing importance of the automobile to Dover residents. Car dealerships, service stations, and diners indicated a development of businesses and services oriented around car travel.

Much of the more recent development of the area has centered on the healthcare industry. The presence of the county hospital between State Street and Governor's Avenue had an immense influence on the types of businesses that located in the area. These health-related businesses account for much of the new infill at the northern and center portions of the project area. In addition, many former residences have been converted to use as offices for private medical practitioners.

The most prevalent building type along south Governor's Avenue and on the surrounding streets is the single-family dwelling. After the large family farms were subdivided, lots were sold individually and buildings erected by their owners. House types are primarily one or 1½-story bungalows and cottages, which date from the 1910s through the 1970s. Some older two-story houses are also present. All are of frame construction, many with ornamental concrete block foundations.