

Chapter 3 – Background Research and Historic Context

The DelDOT recommended APE includes White Village (PIN 0702300029), which was identified as a non-contributing tax parcel in the Winterthur Farms National Register District expansion nomination submitted to DE SHPO in 1992. Only one property in the APE, 4400 Kennett Pike, has been previously surveyed by an architectural historian. The Evelina du Pont house and tenant house were surveyed as two independent properties (N-533, N-534) in 1962 and again in 1972. CRS forms, and update forms have been submitted to the SHPO under separate cover.

New Castle County has designated 34 Historic Zoning Districts throughout the county. These include individual buildings and historic districts and are subject to review by the county Historic Review Board. The DelDOT recommended APE does not include any designated Historic Zoning Districts.

Historic Context

In accordance with state guidelines, the historic context has been divided into chronological periods as set forth in the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). The historic themes of Transportation and Communication, Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change, Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts, and Major Families, Individuals, and Events were identified through research as applicable to the resources found in the DelDOT recommended APE for the current project and are discussed in the historic context.

The intersection of Kennett Pike (SR 52) and Campbell and Kirk Roads (SR 82) APE lies north of Wilmington City limits, in Christiana Hundred, New Castle County. Situated in north central Delaware, Christiana Hundred is adjacent to Brandywine and Mill Creek Hundreds, running northward to the Pennsylvania state line.

The project area is located in the piedmont Geographic Zone as defined by the *Delaware Comprehensive Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). As the most northern of Delaware's geographic zones, the Piedmont encompasses land north of the fall line separating this zone with the Coastal Plain that crisscrosses the state in a generally northeast to southwest direction. A nearly-level-to-hilly topography composed of fertile clay soils well suited for agricultural uses characterizes the Piedmont's surface. Major land forms of the Piedmont include Iron Hill and Chestnut Hill, both located to the south, and Mount Cuba, to the west. 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 flow and drain primarily southeastward into the Christiana River which flows northeast before entering the Delaware River at Wilmington (Ames et al. 1989, 32-34).

Settlement and agricultural development of the region quickened during the 18th Century. Despite heavy silting that denied navigation, the Piedmont's watercourses provided power for mills and early manufacturing (Ames et al. 2006, 11). At first used primarily to power grist and saw mills, by the early 1800's the area's streams powered a wide variety of manufacturing establishments, including a variety of mills: paper, woolen, spice, powder, carding, and iron-

rolling (Ames et al. 1989, 31). Partly in response to the mills' demands for workers, nucleated settlements surrounding these early industrial centers developed.

Despite continued industrial growth along the Piedmont's rural waterways, during much of the 19th century agriculture remained the predominant land use throughout the region. As early as the early nineteenth century, very little uncultivated, arable land remained in the Piedmont region of Delaware (Ames et al. 1989, 47-49). The innovation of improved transportation networks, such as turnpikes – including the Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike – and railroads, greatly assisted both farming and manufacturing activities, and linked the area into the larger, regional economy. Rail access provided farmers with more efficient methods of transporting surplus produce to distance markets, thereby boosting productivity and the cultivation of lucrative cash crops (Ames et al. 2006, 12-14). In addition to furnishing outlets for exploring finished goods, railroads also permitted mill and manufacturing centers a means to import new materials not available locally. The railroads also helped focus commercial activities and further settlement at villages and towns with rail stations (Ames et al. 1989, 49-51).

As Wilmington evolved into the state's largest population and manufacturing center during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of the Piedmont's manufacturing centers ceased operations (Ames et al. 1989, 85-90). Improved transportation systems, such as horse-drawn and later electric streetcars and the advent of the automobile, along with the rise of a wage-earning middle class helped lead to the development of former agricultural land in the immediate surrounding areas of Wilmington (Chase et al. 1992, 6-7). Eventually, advancements in automotive production technology made widespread use of the vehicles affordable. Correlating improvements to surrounding roadways by the State Highway Department provided connections to further hinterlands, thus intensifying suburban development around Wilmington (P.A.C. Spero & co. 1991, 180-189). Throughout most other areas of the Piedmont, the economy continued to rely on agricultural activity (Ames et al. 1989, 51).

Since the end of World War II, the Piedmont has experienced continued suburban growth and development. Much of the region's former agricultural land is now the locus for tract housing and other pre-fabricated development. Associated development of strip malls, big-box chain stores and regional shopping malls designed to accommodate the commercial needs of area residents unwilling to travel further distances have also encumbered large areas of former farmland. Business parks and research laboratories have additionally evolved or relocated to urban and suburban areas, further impacting the Piedmont landscape.

Background Context

Early Industrialization (1770-1830±)

The earliest roads in the Delaware Piedmont were constructed during the Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730±) and Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770±). These roadways were typically rough passages through wooded wilderness or cleared muddy paths to local markets, landings, or industrial areas. Improved roads were rare. Water-based transit remained the primary mode of transportation of goods and people. At the close of the eighteenth century, the nation's network of local and regional roads was inadequate to support the overland movement of people and commerce (Ames et al. 2006, 10).

The principal overland transportation route in Delaware during this time period was a north-south road that began in Chester, PA and traveled through Wilmington, New Castle, and St. Georges, on the way to Dover (Ames et al. 2006, 8). The road forked at Dover before continuing south to Milford, Georgetown and Dagsboro. Additional roads radiated between towns located to the east and west of the trunk route. These roads were classified as post roads and common roads (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 168-169). Post roads were more heavily traveled and linked communities together, while common roads were found in less populated areas (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 169). Common roads were typically dirt passages, little changed from when they were cleared. This system inefficiently connected farm and market through a patchwork series of point-to-point roads (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 169-170).

In northern New Castle County, the inland road system was organized as an extension of the navigable waterways – the Brandywine Creek and Christiana River – leading to the port city of Wilmington (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 170-172). Many common roads extended into northward into southeastern Pennsylvania, providing farmers and traders access to the closest port on the Delaware River (Figure 3-1). One such passage, Kennett Road, connected Market Street in Wilmington to Kennett Square, PA.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, government involvement in road-building was a national debate. The two political parties discussed the construction of a national road network. Across the nation many states, including Delaware, established a framework for the construction of privately financed, government regulated turnpikes. These roads provided direct routes between ports and towns, often with hard, macadam – mixed stone dust and water – or plank surfaces that were well maintained (Ames et al. 2006, 10). Private corporations were organized to construct, maintain, and collect tolls along the road. In Delaware, the organization and membership of each company was controlled by the General Assembly P.A.C. (Spero & Co. 1991, 172). Turnpike companies sold stock, luring which offered the promise of dividends. Tolls were collected at gated intersections accompanied by small toll houses. Government controls were ever-present: turnpikes were required to be licensed before fares could be collected and fines could be levied for improper operating tactics or lax maintenance (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 172).

The primary beneficiaries of turnpike construction were Wilmington merchants, as the city became the de facto destination for the improved roads in northern New Castle County. Commerce was directed along these turnpikes toward the port city for consumption within the urban center and distribution to broader markets. The first turnpike in Delaware was chartered January 30, 1809 between Newport and Gap Tavern, PA (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 172). A turnpike between Newport and Wilmington was chartered in 1811 (Ames et al. 2006, 11). The Newport-Gap or Lancaster Pike provided a direct route between Wilmington and the farms of Lancaster County, PA. Also chartered in 1809, the New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike provided a connection between the Delaware River port city and the Maryland border (Ames et al. 2006, 11).

Petitioned in 1810 and chartered in 1812, the Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike became the most successful turnpike in Delaware, initially privatizing the road between Wilmington and Kennett Square (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 173). The Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike – later

shortened to Kennett Pike (State Route 52) – consisted of a hard road from Centreville to Wilmington and provided a good, reliable, and efficient road between the port city and rich farmland to the north. Commercial travel was enhanced by the proximity of the turnpike to Brandywine Creek, one of the earliest industrialized waterways in America (Ames et al. 2006, 11). Quantities of grain from the Piedmont’s fertile valleys not traveling by ship were transported along Kennett Pike en route to flour mills along the Brandywine (Figure 3-2). Midway on the turnpike, approximately 3.5 miles from the Wilmington city limits at the time and 3 miles from the Pennsylvania border, was a historical crossroads. The east-west road led to mills on Brandywine Creek and Mill Creek. The intersection consisted of a small collection of dwellings and was noteworthy for its landmark storehouse at the southwest corner.

The original Kennett Road was established during the 1730s and extended northwestward from Market Street, slicing a diagonal through the northwest quadrant of Wilmington’s gridded street pattern (HSD 2004, 1). The original tollgate of the road was situated just outside city limits near at what is now Adams Street, near where Delaware Avenue crosses I-95 (HSD 2004, 3). When the city expanded northwest during the 1840s, the tollgate and southern terminus of the Kennett Turnpike relocated just west of present day Scott Street (HSD 2004, 3). The city expanded in 1861 to Union Street. Shortly thereafter the tollgate was moved across from the Columbus Inn (2216 Pennsylvania Ave, Wilmington) (HSD 2004, 3). The final location of the tollgate was at the east side of the roadway at Breck’s Lane, just south of the present day Route 141 interchange. The gate remained operational through 1919, when the road became free.

Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880+/-)

Although there was great fervor for constructing turnpikes during the early decades of the twentieth century, they were not without problems. Most roads did not provide investors with return to justify their continued investment (Ames et al. 2006, 11). Additionally, the promise of new steam-based technologies received much attention from investors during the mid-nineteenth century. Turnpikes were swiftly followed by investments in canals, steamboats, and railroads. These diverging technologies were often in direct competition with each other during the mid-nineteenth century.

Steamboat travel freed water-based transportation from its reliance upon wind and tidal currents and proved itself more efficient than turnpikes for point-to-point transit of large quantities of goods and people. Although not a direct competitor of Kennett Pike, the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal opened in 1829 and displayed the advantages of speed and efficiency of water-based transportation in crossing the Delmarva Peninsula (Ames et al. 2006, 12).

The railroad represented a more direct competitor with Kennett Pike for transportation of the agricultural products from the Piedmont of Northern Delaware and southern Pennsylvania. As early as 1834 a steam powered railroad stretched 82 miles westward from Philadelphia to Columbia, PA on the Susquehanna River (Ames et al. 2006, 13). The line roughly followed the path of the existing Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike. Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore were connected by railroad in 1838. At the time America’s largest city, Philadelphia was extending its regional economic reach westward to Lancaster and southwest toward Baltimore (Ames et al. 2006, 13).

During the mid-nineteenth century, Wilmington's established economic sphere was caught between the larger, regional economic pull of Baltimore and Philadelphia. Local advancements in transportation also changed the landscape. In 1864, Wilmington City Railway provided the first horse-drawn street car along newly developed Delaware Avenue, connecting the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore railroad station along the waterfront, to the Baltimore and Ohio station located on the northwestern outskirts of the city (HSD 2004, 24). The service remained consistent through 1881, when it was expanded (Figure 3-4). Electric trolleys were added in 1888 (Ames et al. 2006, 14). These transportation improvements allowed wage-earners to commute from the outskirts of the city, near the terminus of Kennett Pike to jobs in the historic center of town. Coupled with the real estate ventures of Wilmington entrepreneur Joshua T. Heald, the city was growing north and west (Briggs Green 2007, 16). Wilmington was suburbanizing. Residents in older suburb McDowellville and newly settled Highlands, Forty Acres, and Union Park neighborhoods had access to downtown Wilmington via local transit; Philadelphia, via regional transit; and the agricultural hinterland via Kennett Pike (HSD 2004, 3).

The Wilmington and Northern Railroad, established in 1871, ran adjacent to Kennett Pike through Greenville, where the line constructed an agricultural station, where a post office and coal and lumber businesses were established shortly thereafter (Figures 3-5, 3-6). At first an independent, small community that straddled the railroad and Kennett Pike, Greenville would grow to become a suburban, satellite town, interdependent upon Wilmington.

While the northern and southern ends of Kennett Pike were affected independently by trends in transportation and land development, central Kennett Pike changed in a less dramatic manner. The success of the Eleutherian Mills on the Brandywine Creek and E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company brought the family great wealth. During the early- and mid-nineteenth century, members of the family bought and consolidated holdings of large tracts of land throughout the piedmont of northern Delaware (HSD 2004, 27, 33, 37). Although the area had been inhabited since the European contact period - a variety of eighteenth century farm houses still stand - the second, third, and fourth generations of du Ponts brought a new type of housing to the landscape by building grand, opulent residences on vast estates.

As early as 1820, as documented on Henry Heald's *Roads of New Castle County* (Figure 3-1), a workshop was situated at the northwest corner of the intersection of Kennett Pike and Campbell Road/Kirk Road. Historical road papers and property descriptions in deeds refer to Campbell Road as "the road to Joseph Campbell's Shops." Later maps (Rea and Price 1849, Figure 3-2; Beers 1868, Figure 3-3; and Hopkins 1881, Figure 3-4) indicate a workshop at the southwest corner of the intersection prior to 1893, when no buildings are at that location on the Baist Map (Figure 3-5).

Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940 +/-)

The newly modernized Kennett Pike was designed to standards capable of supporting the motorized traffic that burgeoned throughout northern New Castle County during the first half of the twentieth century (Ames et al. 2006, 16-17). First, mechanized mass transportation, in the form of electric trolleys and after motorized buses, spread its reach across Wilmington and the surrounding suburbs. Shortly thereafter personal ownership of automobiles steadily increased. The sphere of local travel in and around Wilmington broadened. Already an established transportation route, two factors played a role in enhancing traffic on Kennett Pike: the increase in personal automobile ownership and the expansion of suburbanization (Ames et al. 2006, 18).

Defying historical odds, Kennett Pike continued to operate as a turnpike until April 30, 1919 when it became a free roadway. By the end of its life as a toll road, the roadway was in poor condition and the company was financially insolvent (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 175). From 1916 to 1919 the road was operated under the private ownership of Pierre S. du Pont, who purchased the shares of the turnpike company and held them in trust. At the time the road was sold, it was in such poor condition that New Castle County was unwilling to take responsibility for its upkeep (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 175). Du Pont improved Kennett Pike by widening the right-of-way to as broad as 80 feet and paving the road to modern standards. Stands of trees were planted along the road as part of a beautification project. Many of these trees have died or been removed through years of improvements and utility installation. However, there are places where these trees remain, including along the east side of Kennett Pike, just south of Kirk Road (visible in Figure 3-9). After completing the project du Pont declared free access, and turned it over to the State Highway Department.

As the advent of street cars had grown the scope and scale of Wilmington two generations ago, the spread of mechanized transportation further expanded the distance a person could travel on a daily basis. This resulted in the expansion of suburban development along Kennett Pike. Initial development was slow, with the earliest suburban construction at the southern end of Kennett Pike, adjacent to the Wilmington City Limits and influenced by local dignitaries. Started in 1926, Westover Hills is a curvilinear suburban development of architect-designed houses on land formerly owned by William du Pont (Chase et al 1992, 37). Houses were typically sold to du Pont Company upper level management. Additional suburban construction included educational facilities. Such institutions included the Tower Hill School in 1919 and Alexis I du Pont School in 1893, expanded significantly in 1908, 1918 and 1938. Following the national development trend, however, suburbanization along Kennett Pike expanded with increasing speed following World War II

Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization (1940-1962±)

A variety of housing developments and strip malls were constructed along Kennett Pike during the mid-twentieth century. Representative examples of this construction include the 606-unit Monroe Park (now Greenville Place) apartment complex in 1950, Greenville Shopping Center in 1952, and West Farm subdivision platted in 1952 (HSD 2004, 41-43). The construction of the large Monroe Park garden apartment complex was a departure from the type of suburban construction previously seen in and around Greenville. The influx of population laid

the ground work in the foreseeable future for the Shield's Lumber Shopping Center (now Greenville Shopping Center). One of Wilmington's first suburban shopping locations, as originally constructed, the center contained a grocery store, pharmacy as well as a variety of other shops (HSD 2004, 41-43). Further north, West Farm was designed as a 20-lot housing development at the intersection of Kirk Road and Kennett Pike (Figure 3-11). The tract was carved out of an eighteenth century farm on the estate of Henry A. du Pont. These examples of mid-century suburban development are representative of the type of growth, construction, and infill evident along the length of Kennett Pike.

In addition to residential and commercial growth, the services and recreation expanded along Kennett Pike, including the opening of the Winterthur Museum and Gardens in 1951, construction of Eugene du Pont Memorial Hospital in 1954, conversion of the Goodstay Farm into a University of Delaware satellite campus, northward migration of the Wilmington Country Club during the early 1960s, and the construction of the Delaware Museum of Natural History in 1972 (Figure 3-9).

Growth in roadway travel related to suburban development along Kennett Pike brought about the requisite maintenance. The 4.5 mile length of Kennett Pike from Barley Mill to the Pennsylvania State Line was graded and improved in 1940 and again during the 1970s (DelDOT Contract Nos. 66 and 715). DelDOT road papers show the section from Greenville to Wilmington was improved in 1953. A variety of intersection improvements and other smaller projects have also occurred since the road became public.



Figure 2-1 Henry Heald Roads of New Castle County Surveyed and Printed, 1820

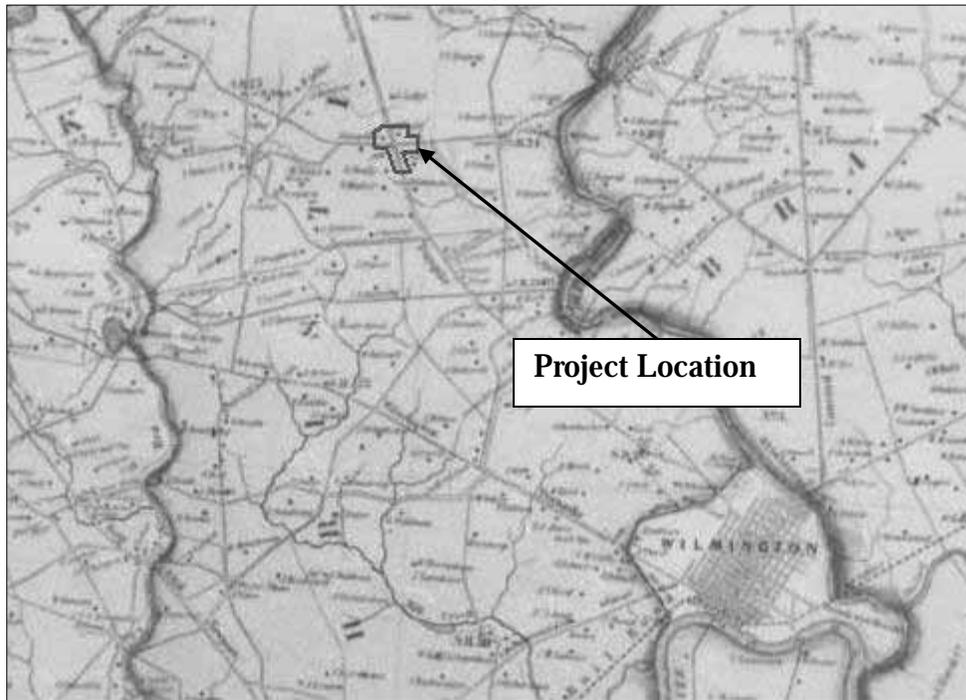


Figure 3-2 Samuel M. Rea and Jacob Price, *Map of New Castle County, Delaware*, 1849



Figure 3-3 1868 J.G. Beers, *Atlas of Delaware*

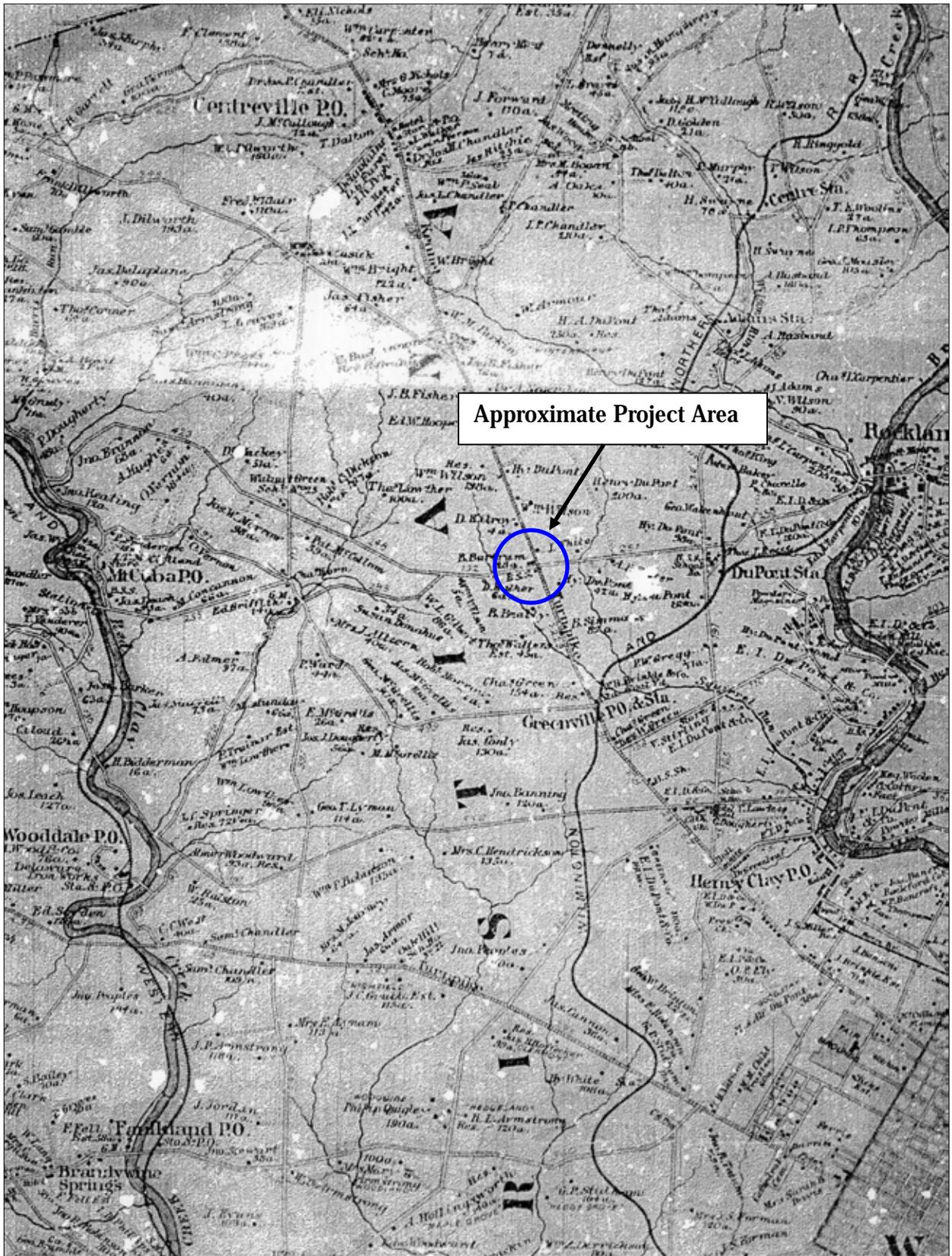


Figure 3-3 G.M. Hopkins, *Map of New Castle County, Delaware*, 1881.

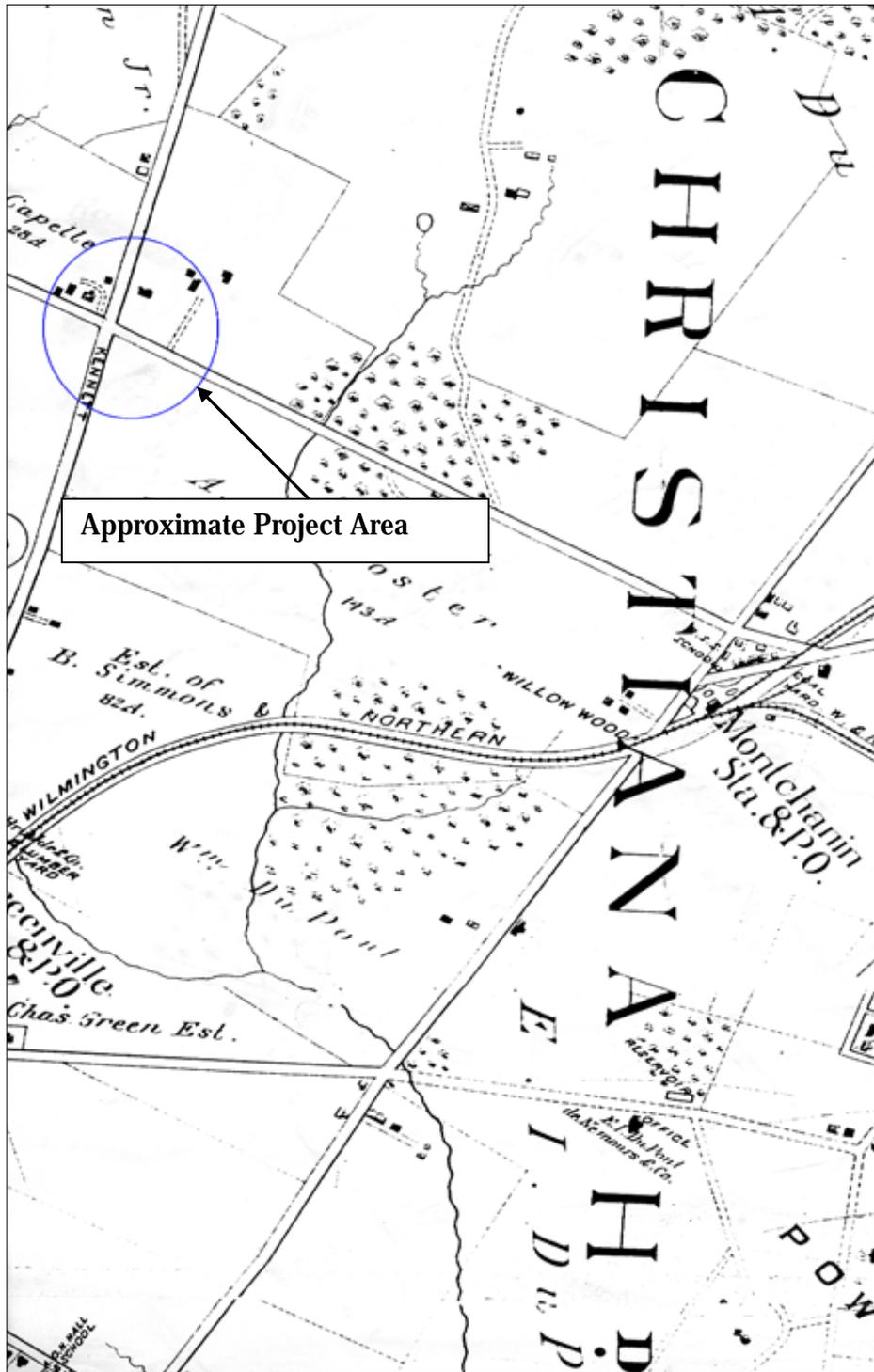


Figure 3-5 G. William Baist, *Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware, 1893*

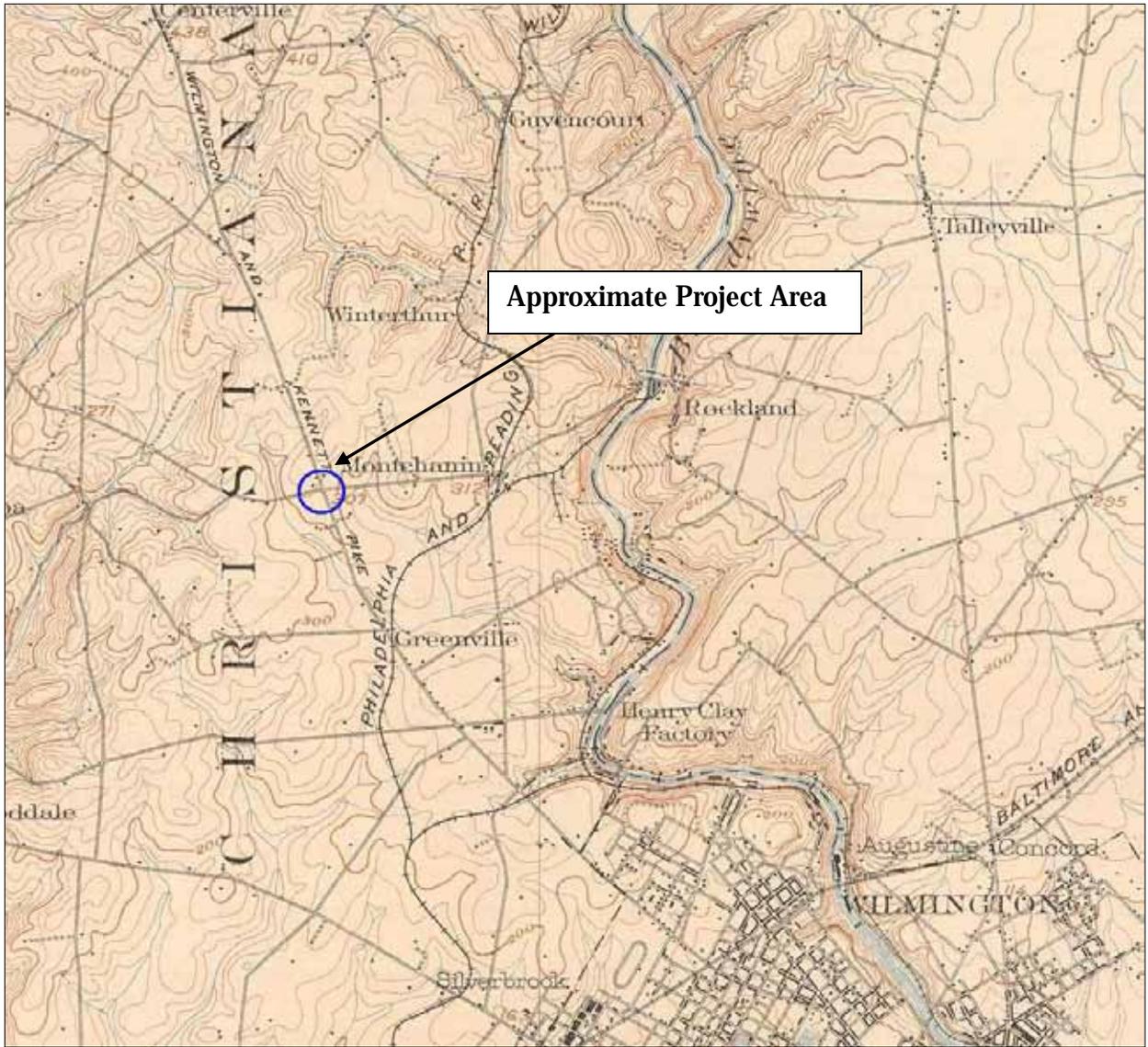


Figure 3-6 1904 U.S.G.S. 15' Quadrangle: West Chester, PA-DE

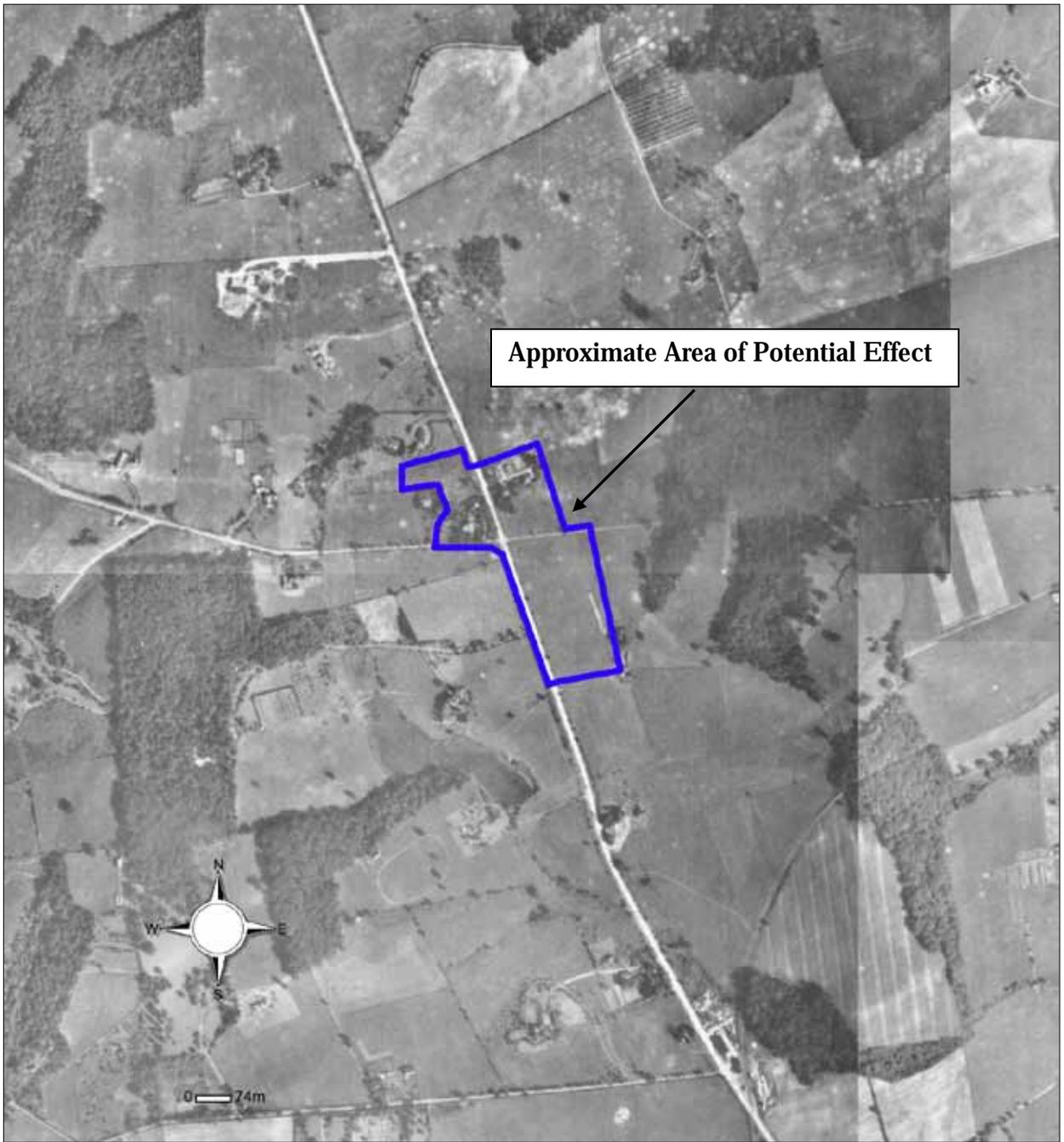


Figure 3-7 1937 Aerial Photograph (Delaware CHRIS)

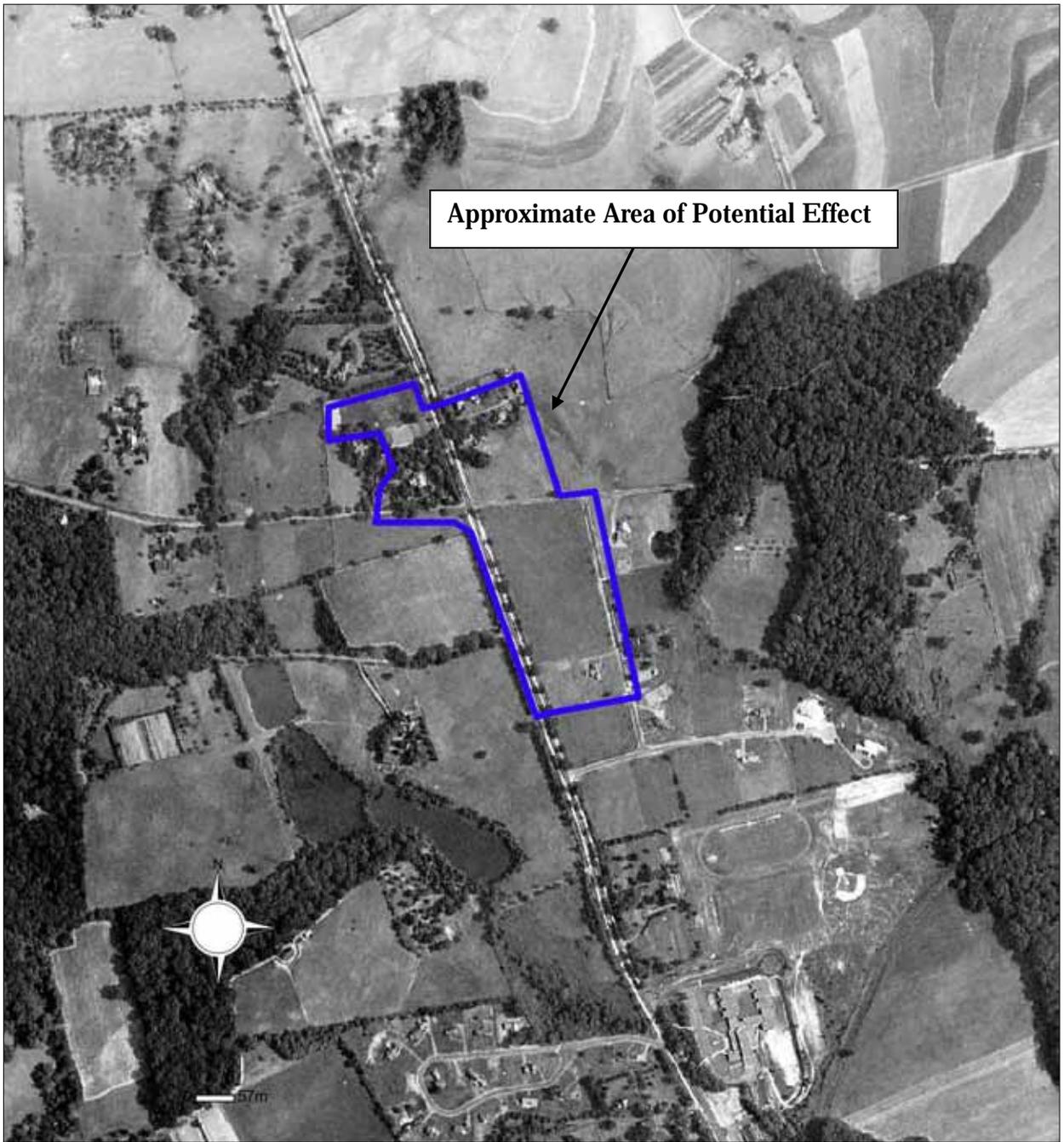


Figure 3-8 1954 Aerial Photograph (Delaware CHRIS)

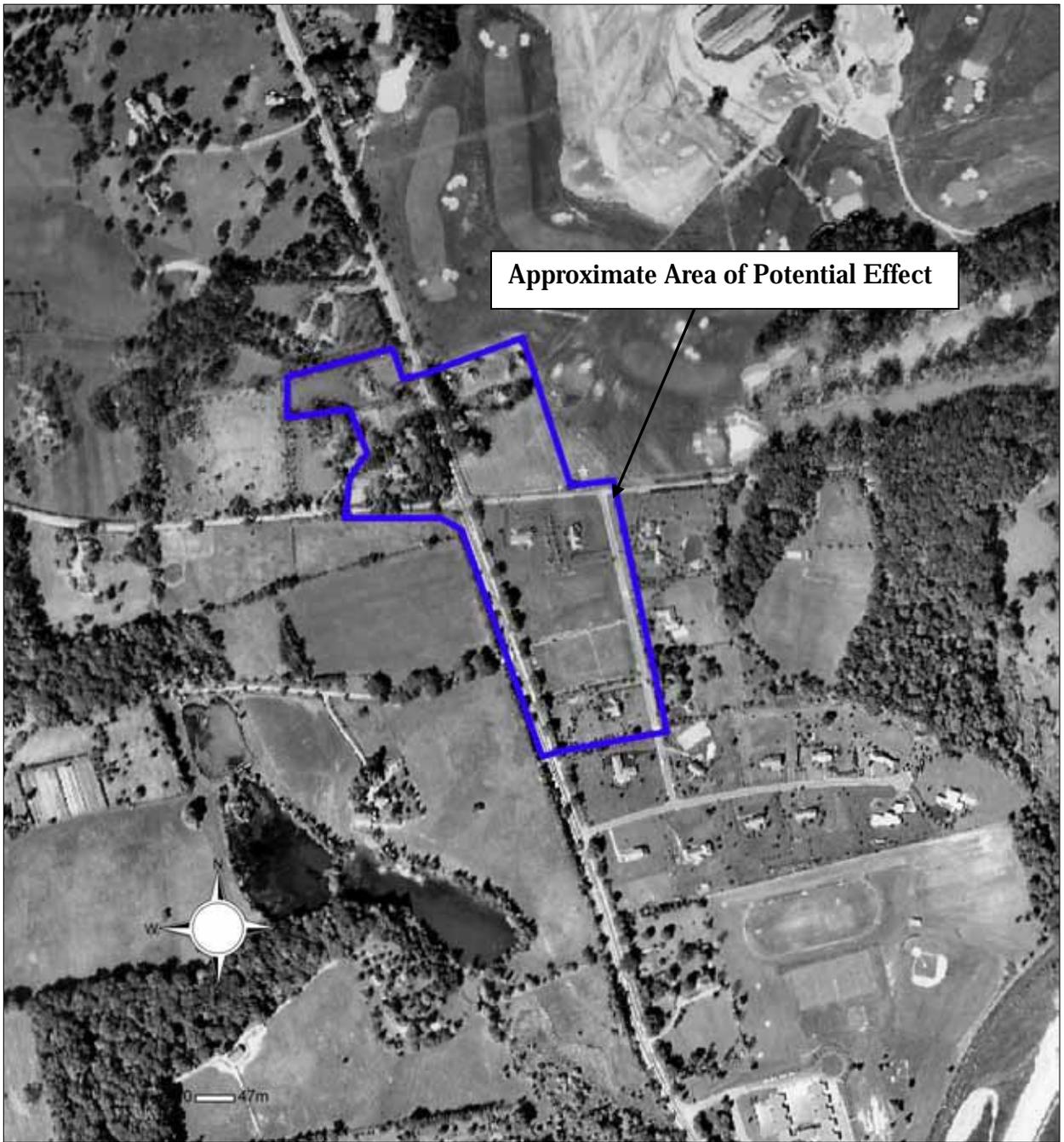


Figure 3-9 1961 Aerial Photograph (Delaware CHRIS)



Figure 3-10: 1968 Aerial Photograph, Scale 1:5,481(Delaware DataMIL)

