

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The architectural resources examined in this study are situated on Porter Road between Routes 896 and 72 in Pencader Hundred, New Castle County. Pencader Hundred is situated in southern New Castle County in the Upper Peninsula Zone (Herman and Siders 1989:19). New Castle County is the northernmost of Delaware's three counties.

The permanent settlement of this area can be traced to William Penn's 1701 grant of 30,000 acres south and west of Newark to three Welsh immigrants. Upon purchase, the immigrants divided the 30,000 acres and sold large parcels to individuals who built houses and began farming the land (Scharf 1888:950).

New Castle County was originally divided into five subdivisions, or hundreds (Conrad 1908:286). In 1710, with the addition of Pencader, Red Lion, Mill Creek, and White Clay Creek hundreds, the number of hundreds in New Castle County had increased to nine (Conrad 1908:287).

The land in this region of Delaware is generally level, with some rolling hills. Major topographical features of the Upper Peninsula Zone include Garrisons Lake, Killens Pond, Lums Pond, and McCauley Pond. The Christiana River, Becks Pond, and Belltown River are water sources close to the project area. This area of New Castle County rests on sediments of sand, clay, and gravel (Herman 1987:6). The soil in the southern and southeastern parts of Pencader Hundred is Matapeake-Sassafras, which is one of the better farming soils found in the country (NCCDP 1994:5). The early agricultural economy of New Castle County was based on a system of mixed farming, a combination of grain cultivation (chiefly wheat, corn, barley, and oats) and livestock raising (Bowers 1987:5).

From the middle of the eighteenth century, the principal north-south route through Pencader Hundred was known as Newark Road or Glasgow Road, to which present-day Route 896 generally corresponds. The road extended from Newark to Buck Tavern in St. Georges Hundred, passing through Cooch's Bridge. Two important east-west routes extended from Christiana through Cooch's Bridge to the Elk River in Maryland, and from New Castle through the middle of Pencader Hundred to Frenchtown. In the early nineteenth century, both routes became turnpikes, known as the Elkton-Christiana Turnpike, what is approximately the current Old Baltimore Pike (completed 1817), and the New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike, current Route 40 (completed 1815) (Bowers 1987:7, 11).

In 1829 the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal was completed (Reed 1947:377). This waterway was seen as a major transportation improvement for New Castle County and its farming community. New transportation methods and routes, such as canals and railroads, became

feasible in part because of the increased population pressures in settled areas and the growing demand for agricultural products (DeCunzo and Garcia 1992:212).

In 1837, the Delaware and the Newark & Delaware City divisions of the Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington Railroad were completed through Pencader Hundred. At the junction of the two divisions was the small hamlet of Porter's Station, over three miles east of Newark Road (Route 896). Surrounded by agricultural lands, Porter's Station was comprised of homes, several stores, and a railroad station (Bevan 1929:807; NCCDP 1994:12).

Porter Road, from Route 896 to Route 72, was established sometime between 1849 and 1868 (Rea & Price 1849; Beers 1868) (Figures 2 and 3). The 1893 *G. W. Baist Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware* (Figure 4) shows the name of present-day Route 72 to be Bowersville Road. Nineteenth-century deed references for the W.B. Calhoun House refer to Route 72 as both "the state highway leading from Ferris' Corner to Jester's Corner," and "Nine Foot Road" (New Castle County Deed Book [NCCDB] P66:357).

Historical maps illustrate the pattern and extent of settlement along the established road network in the nineteenth century. As Figure 2 shows, in 1849 the majority of dwellings were not located in close proximity to primary transportation routes. By 1868 and 1893 (see Figures 3 and 4) more and more roads were established and a greater number of farmsteads and dwellings were located close to roadways.

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, houses built in New Castle County were usually one room or hall and parlor plan, and of frame construction (NCCDP 1994:23). The houses that were constructed of brick were usually owned by wealthy individuals. Throughout the century New Castle County houses experienced a general rebuilding and restructuring, which was first seen in 1820 with the incorporation of service wings into the main house block (Herman 1987:2,8).

During the nineteenth century significant change occurred in the architecture of rural New Castle County. Older frame dwellings and tenements were replaced or rebuilt on new locations (Bowers 1987:13-14). Specifically, from 1820 to 1870 there was much remodeling of existing structures, replacement of old buildings with new ones, and substantial remodeling of recent buildings (Herman 1987:12).

A good portion of Pencader Hundred remained agricultural well into the twentieth century. In the 1960s, New Castle County was becoming increasingly suburbanized. During this time the DuPont Corporation located a plant and office complex in Pencader Hundred near Glasgow. In the 1980s and 1990s, Pencader Hundred saw massive residential development, to such a degree that the 1993 *Central Pencader Land Use Study* found 86 percent of all housing units in Central Pencader to have been built after 1970 (NCCDP 1994:2).

Previous research in the project area vicinity has been in the form of an architectural survey of Pencader Hundred, recently completed by the New Castle County Department of Planning; LBA's architectural investigation of the Route 896 Corridor, Summit Bridge to SR 4, completed

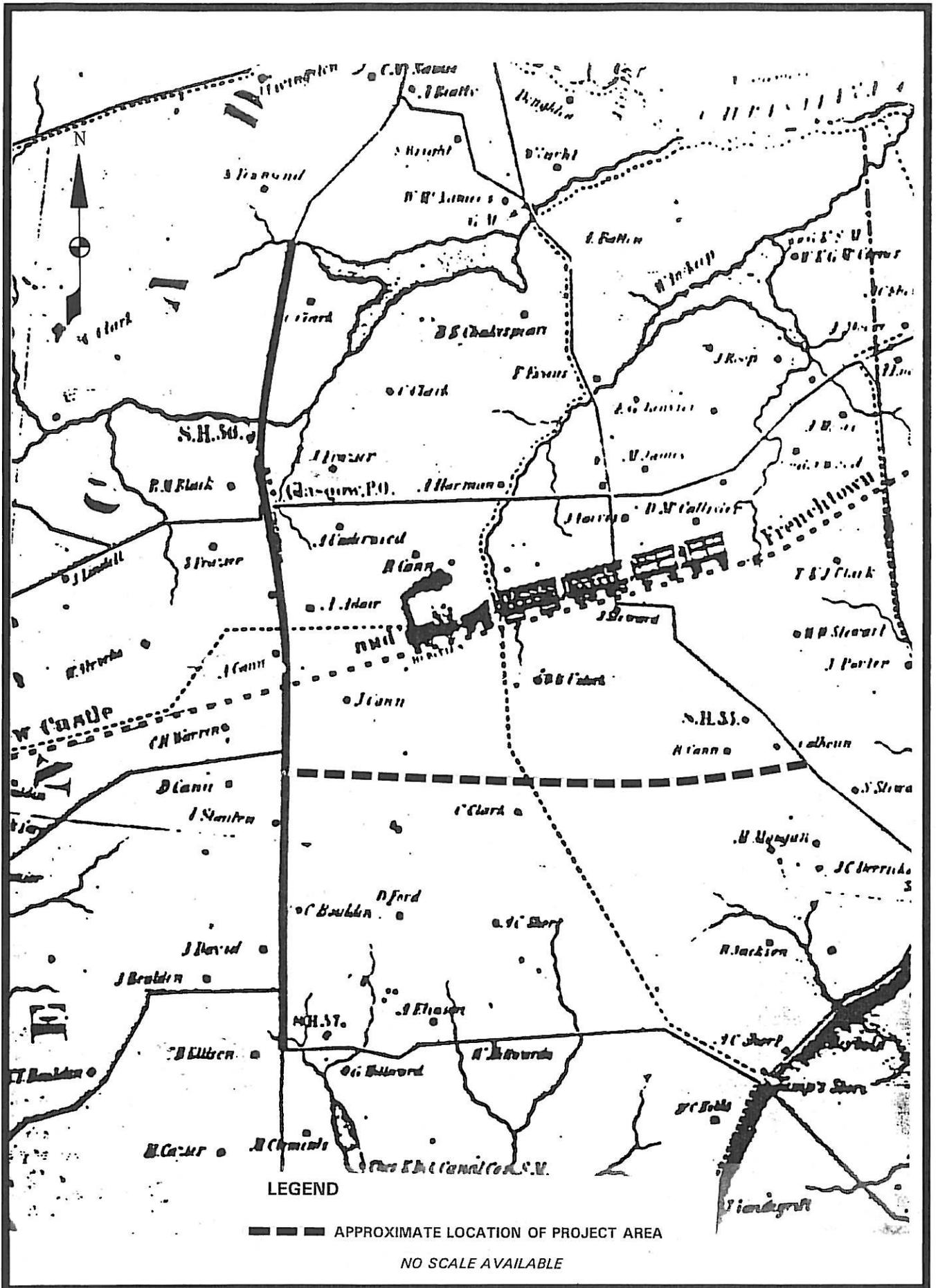


FIGURE 2: Project Area Map, 1849

SOURCE: Rea & Price, "Map of New Castle County, Delaware" 1849

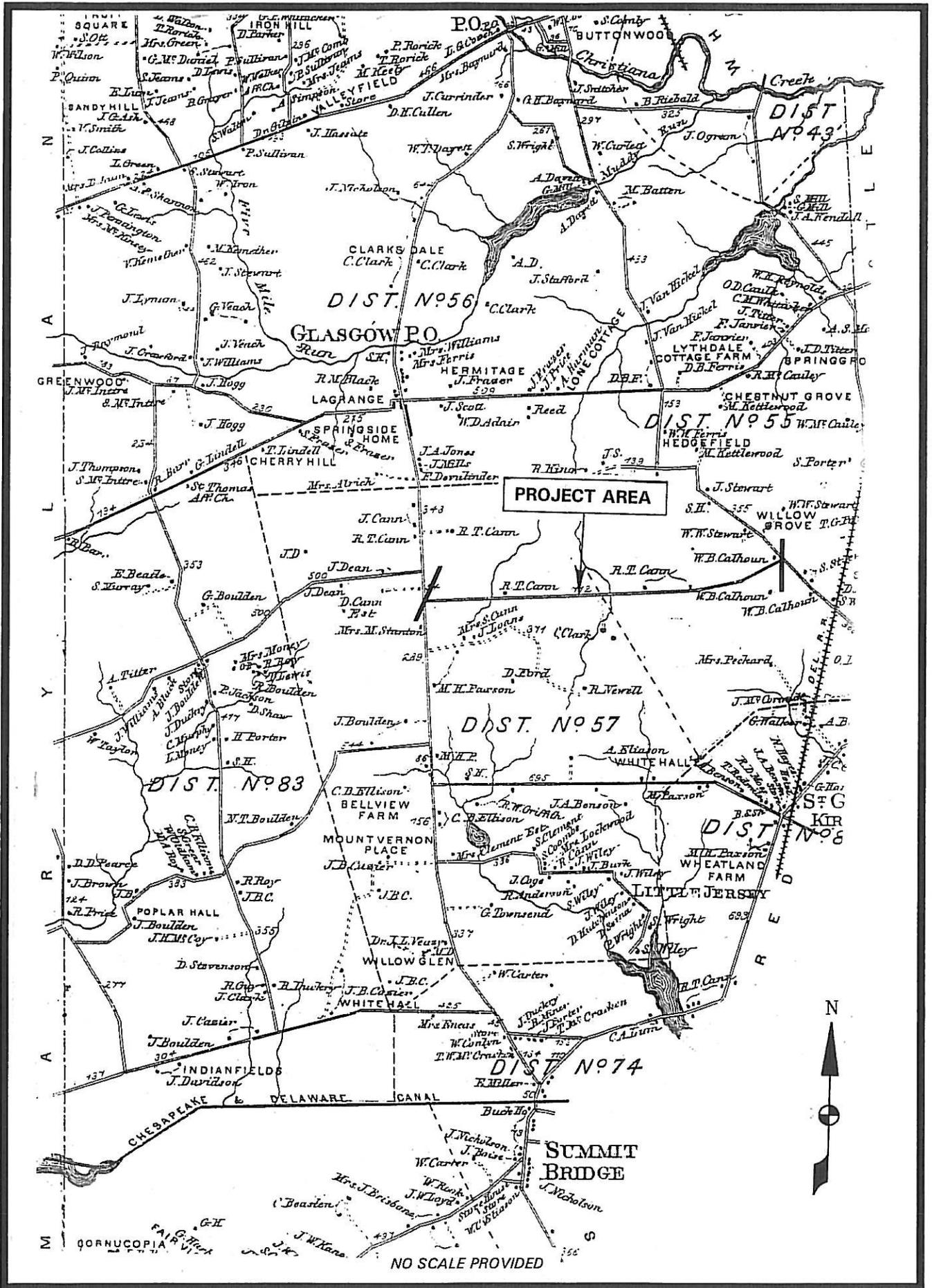


FIGURE 3: Project Area Map, 1868

SOURCE: D.G. Beers Atlas of State of Delaware 1868

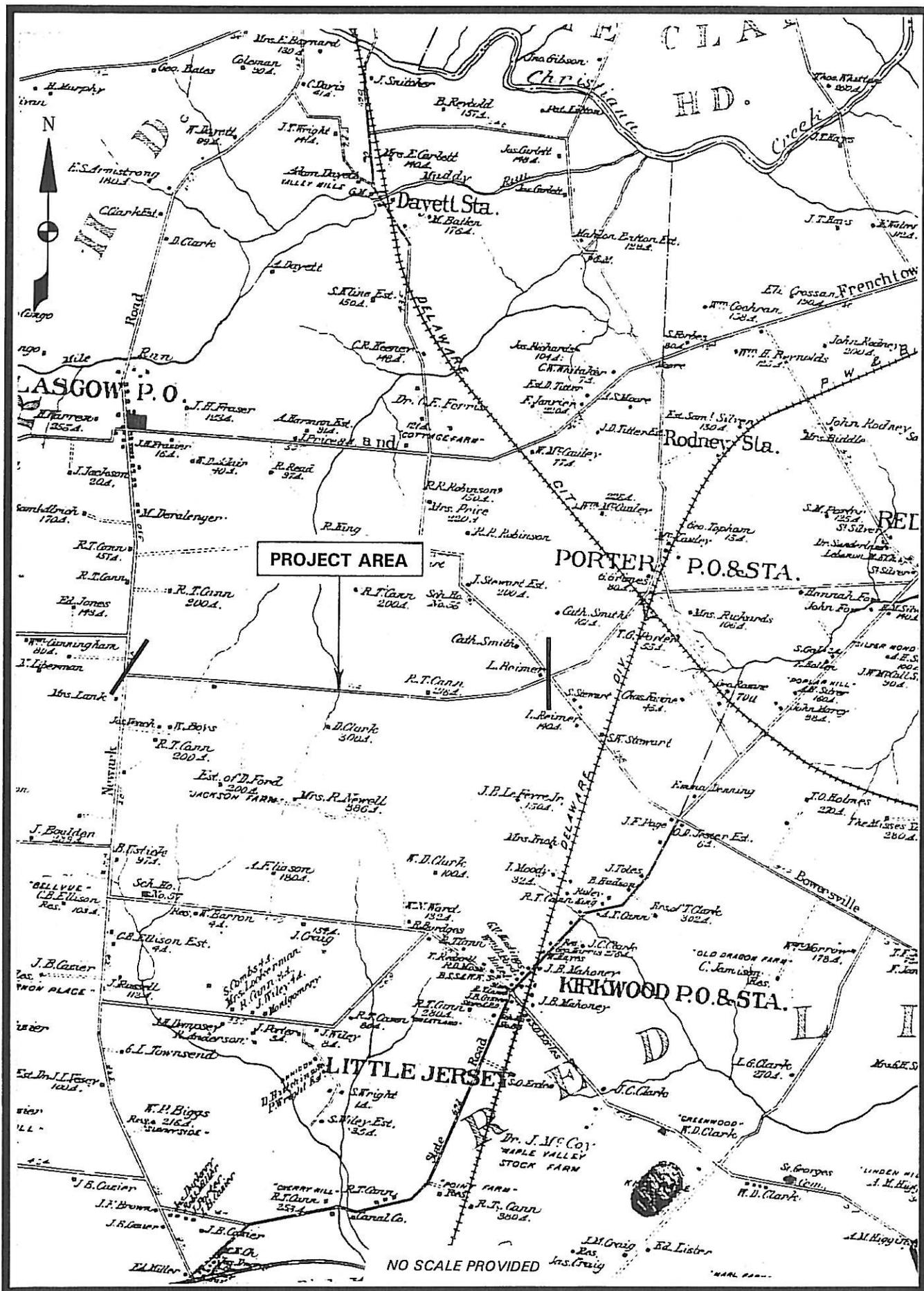


FIGURE 4: Project Area Map, 1893

SOURCE: G.W. Baist Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware 1893

in 1987; and an investigation of Route 301 prepared by the University of Delaware Center for Archaeological Research, completed in 1992. Of these prior investigations, only the architectural survey of Pencader Hundred identified a resource, the W. B. Calhoun House, within the Porter Road project area.

THE DELAWARE COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* defines four geographic zones for the state of Delaware, identifying important themes and property types likely to be found within each zone. The Porter Road project area, situated in Pencader Hundred, is located in the Upper Peninsula Zone.

All of the architectural resources identified within the project area date to the period of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940±. For these resources, the most applicable themes are Agriculture and Architecture.

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* states that the survival rates for historic resources in the Upper Peninsula Zone during the period of Industrialization and Early Urbanization 1830-1880± are among the best in the state and that such resources should be evaluated critically with respect to integrity issues. During the period of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940±, the architectural character of the previous period continued in the rural areas of the zone. However, the beginnings of suburban development, loss of agricultural lands, and transportation improvements emerged as factors which brought increasing change to rural environments, particularly those near population centers and major roads. The architectural integrity of historic resources identified for the latter period, in particular, should be critically evaluated because it is for this period that there is the least amount of comprehensive cultural resource survey documentation (Herman and Siders 1989:34-35).

HISTORIC CONTEXTS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE PORTER ROAD PROJECT AREA

1. Agriculture

New Castle County had one of the first agricultural societies in the United States. Formed in 1818, the society was an early promoter of fertilization and crop rotation, which led to increased yields per acre of land and a rise in farmland prices within the county (Reed 1947:379). Improved transportation routes in the form of the completion of the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal in 1829, and the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad which passed through Pencader Hundred by 1837, provided New Castle County farmers greater access to the Wilmington, Philadelphia, and Baltimore markets.

During the eighteenth century New Castle County farmers grew a variety of crops, the majority being cereal products. By the mid-nineteenth century Delaware had become the center for peach production in the eastern United States. The state's good access to markets, rich soil, favorable

climate, and rainfall were all reasons why farmers grew peaches (DeCunzo and Garcia 1992:26). By the late nineteenth century New Castle County farmers were diversifying. A blight to the peach crop, which began in 1870, forced farmers to further expand the variety of items they produced. While primary agricultural production shifted toward the midwest, dairy products, fruits, and vegetables gained ready markets and kept the Delaware farmer competitive locally.

The Depression years of the 1890s affected the established land-holding patterns, resulting in the diversification of land ownership and the reallocation of property. Farmers who had owned twenty or more farms in the 1860s now found themselves reduced to five or six properties (Herman and Siders 1989:35). As agricultural practices shifted toward greater commercialization, multi-use farm buildings came into fashion.

The shift from the production of cereal grains to orchard and dairy products during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century provided an incentive for farmers to construct new outbuildings, such as dairy barns. The agricultural shift away from cereal products also brought with it the natural loss of outbuildings that had once been devoted to wheat, such as silos. During this time, concrete block became a material commonly used in constructing various types of multi-use outbuildings.

By 1900, more than half of the farmers in Delaware were tenants or sharecroppers (NCCDP 1994:15). As the twentieth century progressed, the southern portions of New Castle County became increasingly attractive to industry, manufacturing, and suburban development. By 1950, those processes which managed to alter Pencader Hundred and southern New Castle County so drastically were already well under way.

Property Types Within the Project Area: Rural Farm Site

2. Architecture

The Late Victorian era produced a variety of domestic architectural fashions derived from earlier historical precedents, with considerable emphasis on asymmetrical forms and elaborate surface treatments. At the "high" end, dwellings could manifest considerable attention to stylistic ornament, while at the broader "popular" end of the architectural spectrum, expression of style might consist only of a token of reference. In rural and semi-rural settings, characteristically "folk dwellings," which were usually simple in form, such as an I-house, gable front, or gable-front and wing, very often had detailing inspired by Classical-Revival, Italianate, or Queen Anne styles. The primary areas for the application of this detailing were at the main entrance, porch, or cornice line (McAlester and McAlester 1989:309). Throughout the Upper Peninsula Zone, simple farmhouses were detailed in this manner.

Around the turn of the century, and with increasing speed thereafter, houses tended to become smaller, more horizontal, and simpler in detail, partly as a reaction to the Victorian era and partly due to high construction and labor costs. The Bungalow, with its straightforward use of materials, low profile, and open, multi-purpose plan, came to epitomize the dwelling of choice

for families of relatively modest means. During the same decades, proliferation of the automobile and greatly improved roads made possible the clear geographic separation of home and workplace, resulting in construction of residences in areas heretofore almost entirely agricultural. This process, which accelerated during the 1920s, was brought to a halt by economic depression and the war, only to resume at an ever larger scale in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Although Route 896 was dualized in 1937-1938 (bypassing Glasgow in the process), both it and Porter Road experienced little immediate change in their agrarian environments. From the late 1940s onward, however, a number of small, exclusively residential properties were developed along Porter Road, possibly reflecting the effects of postwar housing demands and the geographical freedom offered by the automobile. Rather typically, in that period of high labor costs, these dwellings exhibited economies of floor space and of exterior detail. Such houses, termed "Minimal-Traditional" by McAlester and McAlester (1989:477), constituted, in effect, extremely stripped-down versions of Eclectic-Revival styles prevalent in previous decades, particularly the "Georgian" or Classical Revival, "Cape," and "Tudor." These small house forms were in turn largely supplanted by the Ranch style by the end of the 1960s.

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s brought ranch style housing, subdivisions, and increased densities of residential development along Porter Road. In effect, the development which occurred along Porter Road can be viewed as a microcosm of the development that took place throughout the county during the twentieth century.

Property Types Within the Project Area: Late Victorian property type; Minimal Traditional property type.