

3.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND HISTORIC CONTEXTS

3.1 Introduction

All of the historic resources located within the project APE were evaluated according to the criteria set forth in the National Register Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (National Park Service 1990) and the *Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places* (National Park Service 2003). Additionally, the historic resource survey and evaluation was performed in accordance with guidelines, priorities, and contexts found in the *Delaware Historic Context Master Reference and Summary* (Herman *et al.* 1989) and the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames *et al.* 1989). Other information applied included historic contexts on Delaware agriculture and agricultural tenancy, African American settlement, and roadside architecture.

The history of New Castle County, Delaware, and more specifically New Castle Hundred, also provides an interpretive context for the evaluation of identified and located historic resources within the APE. The majority of historic resources found within the APE pertain to Delaware's role in twentieth century American history relative to suburbanization. However, certain historic resources reflect Delaware's nineteenth century history. No resources related to Delaware's seventeenth and eighteenth century history are located in the APE. Consequently, only brief presentations of historic contexts for these periods are included.

3.2 Native American and European Contact

The arrival of European colonists in the Delaware River region resulted in a period of cultural contact between 1610 and 1750 that concluded with the displacement of the Delaware from the project area. In 1609, Henry Hudson charted Delaware Bay, and Dutch merchants, from their trading post at New Amsterdam, returned to trade for furs with the Delaware. In 1610, Samuel Argall sailed from the English colony at Jamestown into Delaware Bay and named the body of water in honor of Thomas West, Lord de la Warr, governor of the Virginia colony. Attacks by Susquehannocks from the Susquehanna River region in the 1620s and cessions of lands to European colonists contributed to the dispersal of the Delaware population from this region of the Delaware River. Additionally, in an effort to establish control over the fur trade, the Iroquois

achieved military dominance over the Delaware, placing them in a tributary status by the middle of the seventeenth century. In the 1740s, the Delaware occupied land within the Six Nations's conquered territories west of the Delaware River region (Goddard 1978:214, 222).

3.3 Colonial and Early National Period

Northern Delaware witnessed the contests of European imperial powers for control of land and trading opportunities. Initially, colonists from Sweden and the Netherlands fought one another for possession of settlements and forts along the Delaware River. Ultimately, however, the Delmarva Peninsula would become an English possession, following the arrival of a British invasion force in 1664. A 1682 land grant from the Duke of York to William Penn placed the territory south of Pennsylvania and on the western shore of the Delaware Bay and River under the governance of his colony.

Early sustained settlement of land within New Castle and neighboring Pencader hundreds occurred after a 1701 William Penn grant of 30,000 acres known as the Welsh Tract. The Welsh settlers developed the natural resources of the area, including iron ore. The main pursuit of the settlers, however, was agriculture, particularly the cultivation and processing of grains. Due to its location between the Brandywine and Christina rivers, Wilmington developed as a mercantile community and shipping point based on trade and milling. By the early eighteenth century, New Castle County was a major exporter of flour, reaching markets in the West Indies, as well as fellow colonies, and two provinces in Quebec (Kuhlmann 1929:20-22).

Due to increases in the numbers of immigrants, a period of regional population and settlement growth began in New Castle County in the 1730s. In Christiana Bridge (located just north of the project region), this trend was reflected in the growth of the hamlet from a small community of approximately 10 houses in 1737, to a larger town that contained several mills, 50 to 60 houses, and several taverns by the end of the century. Christiana Bridge also benefited from the shipping and trading of agricultural produce between the Chesapeake Bay and Philadelphia, some of which were grown in Christiana Bridge's hinterlands, including the project region (Catts and Coleman 1984:9).

3.4 Nineteenth Century Agriculture in the Project Region

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the riparian zones of New Castle County featured numerous mills. Milling characterized the early phase of the Industrial Revolution in the United States, and focused much of New Castle County's agricultural production on grain growing. Water power, however, was directed to power various mills: sawmills, cotton mills, paper mills, flour mills, and gunpowder mills. The effects of President Thomas Jefferson's embargo against trade with France and Great Britain and the War of 1812 led to a shift in the products of the local mills, with a majority of them switching from flour milling to processing other commodities, such as cotton and woolen goods, iron, snuff, and spices (Pursell 1958:10-11). By the middle of the nineteenth century, leather tanning, carriage and wagon making, and ship building characterized the manufactures of Wilmington (Hoffecker 1988:146).

The profitability of agriculture in New Castle County began to decline in the early nineteenth century, a trend experienced in other Atlantic seaboard agricultural regions. Exhausted soil and fertile lands in the West reduced land values in the region. As Baltimore emerged as a major commercial center and transportation costs fell, New Castle County, including the Christiana Bridge area, endured a period of decline. Improvements to the road network at Christiana Bridge in 1813 and 1815 by two turnpike companies attempted to stimulate commerce there (Catts and Coleman 1984:14-15).

To revive agriculture from its depressed state, elite farmers promoted various farming reform movements. The experiments and writings that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison produced for the Agricultural Society of Albemarle typified this effort to preserve the nation's agrarian character. In northern Delaware, the cause of agrarian reform was championed by Samuel H. Black of Pencader Hundred, a prominent doctor, brigadier general of the state militia, and member of the state legislature. Black advocated improvements to farming techniques and demonstrated his innovative farming methods at LaGrange (N-576), his farm located in Glasgow. Black participated in the Agricultural Society of New Castle County and built a granary at LaGrange that incorporated his ideas for improvement by facilitating access for wheeled vehicles (Allmond 1958:56-61; Herman 1987:116-118). The granary was included in a 1985 Historic American Building Survey and still stands on the farm (HABS No. DE-216) located west of the APE.

The improved agricultural techniques, combined with a generally favorable combination of soils and climate, made lower New Castle County (an area that includes the project APE) the

wealthiest agricultural district in the state (Herman 1987:6). The agricultural reforms coincided with a phase of architectural rebuilding and renovation. From 1820 to 1870, there were three roughly concurrent types of domestic architectural activity: the remodeling of existing structures; the replacement of old buildings with completely new ones; and the substantial remodeling of new buildings within a few years of their initial construction (Herman 1987:12, 128-139). During the same period, houses were often given names, both to distinguish them from other farms in the region, and to create and evoke a sense of identity (Herman 1987:12, 122-123).

One farmhouse in the project APE appears to date from the early half of this 1820-1870 period, the Ashton House (N-1598). The Ashton House appears to have been built *newca.* 1830 and remodeled later in the nineteenth century and again in the early twentieth century (Rea and Price 1849; Beers 1868; G.M. Hopkins & Company 1881; Baist 1893) (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). Integrity problems with the house and lack of associated historic outbuildings, however, compromise the ability of the farmhouse and farm to convey a historical feeling and association of the era.

Agriculture continued to define the local economy of New Castle Hundred into the late nineteenth century. However, as the Midwest began to dominate grain production in the second half of the nineteenth century, New Castle Hundred farmers adapted, increasingly shifting to fruit and vegetable production, commodities that could exploit nearby urban markets through the improved transportation infrastructure. Local farmers also turned to dairy and beef cattle. Wealthy farmers who owned large tracts of land adopted the practice of leasing portions of their land holdings to tenants. Tenancy became quite pronounced. For instance, according to an 1888 state history, "Many large tracts of land are held by non-residents and are occupied by a class of citizens, whose tenure being uncertain, they do not become deeply interested in the affairs of their transient homes" (Scharf 1888:852). Tenant farms accounted for approximately half of the farms in the county, with many of the farms featuring domestic dwellings built specifically for tenants (Sheppard *et al.* 2001; Siders *et al.* 1991:3). No examples of tenant houses, however, remain within the project APE.

The rural nature of New Castle Hundred in general, and of the APE in particular, is reflected in nineteenth century atlases. As maps from the mid- and late nineteenth century indicate (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6), the area along School Bell Road was lined with farms. The amount of land contained in the farms seems to be in keeping with the mid-nineteenth century New Castle County range of large and mid-sized estates approximating 80.9 ha (200.0 ac) and 40.5 ha (100.0 ac) (Herman 1987:113-114).

3.5 Slavery and Free African American Settlement in New Castle County

African slaves arrived in colonial Delaware through the maritime activities of Dutch slave traders and the emigration of Maryland tobacco planters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Due to the scarcity of labor in the colony, planters augmented the indentured labor force with chattel slaves. The number of slaves increased throughout the eighteenth century, reaching approximately 2,000 in 1775. During the nineteenth century, the slave population gradually declined in number, particularly in New Castle County (Munroe 1984:53-58).

Although the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States following the Civil War, Delaware failed to ratify this amendment and the subsequent amendments that granted civil rights to African Americans until 1901. Such neglect typified the state's racist policies, which were motivated by bigotry and a perceived need for a permanent and tractable labor force. African Americans were denied the franchise well into the twentieth century. At the local level, the deliberate non-collection of taxes from African Americans by local authorities denied blacks voting rights and participation on juries. Public education for blacks was substandard. As a result this discrimination, the state's African American community tended to settle into enclaves in the vicinity of African Union Methodist churches and facilities that processed agricultural products (Livesay 1968:93-96; Munroe 1984:145-152; Skelcher 1995).

An African Union church is noted at the intersection of School Bell Road and the predecessor of S.R. 7 on all nineteenth century maps of New Castle County (Rea and Price 1849; Beers 1868; G.M. Hopkins & Company 1881; Baist 1893). The area is located a short distance to the northwest of the project APE. The church does not appear on twentieth century USGS topographic quadrangles, leading to the conclusion that it disbanded in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. No evidence of historic African American settlement was found within the project APE.

3.6 Road Networks and Development in the Project Region

Christiana Bridge, located a short distance northwest of the project APE, became a significant crossroads community by the middle of the eighteenth century due to the presence of mills and other businesses. The economic and commercial activities led to the development and improvement of the road network through and near the town. The road from Red Lion to New

Castle (the predecessor to S.R. 7) and the road from Christiana Bridge to Newport contributed to its growth and became important travel arteries (Catts and Coleman 1984:10). School Bell Road intersects with S.R. 7 at its western terminus. Its eastern terminus is U.S. Route 40, also known as the Pulaski Highway, a major east-west travel route across New Castle County. U.S. Route 40 was developed in the early nineteenth century as the New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike, which ran between Head of Elk, Maryland, and the city of New Castle. Built during an era of extensive turnpike construction, the New Castle and Frenchtown Turnpike became part of an overland road system linking New Castle to Baltimore and, *via* the National Road, the American Midwest.

Despite the developed road network, Christiana Bridge and the area surrounding it (including School Bell Road) retained its rural character throughout the nineteenth and into the mid-twentieth century, due in part to the economic activity of towns closer to the Delaware River. "The relation of Wilmington, New Castle City, and Newport and other towns outside the bounds of the hundred has prevented the founding of other villages, with their separate business histories" (Scharf 1888:852).

The rural nature of the area underwent a change in the mid-twentieth century. Contributing factors included improvements to the road network, a shift in the nature of Delaware agriculture, and the prosperity of the post-World War II years. The growing affordability of private automobiles and popularity of automobile tourism in the early twentieth century birthed new highway construction and improvements to existing roads. The Delaware State Highway Department formed in 1917, for example, made improving U.S. 40 a high priority, adding and widening lanes throughout the twentieth century. Despite its status as an important east-west route through New Castle County, improvements to U.S. 40 did not spawn a significant amount of residential development during the first half of the twentieth century. The situation would change following World War II.

3.7 Suburbanization

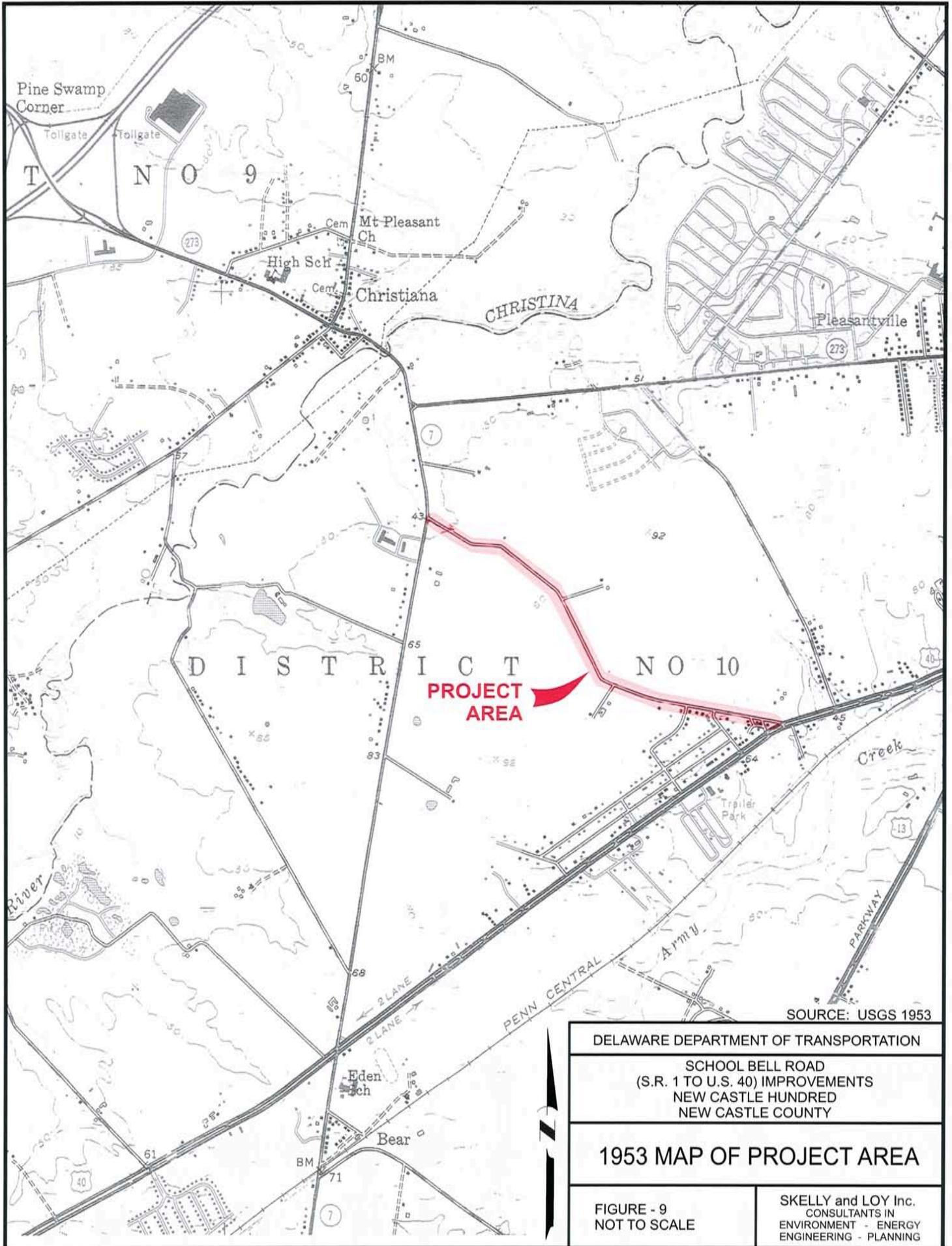
The post-World War II era, known as the 1940-1960± Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization chronological period, was a time of intense residential construction in New Castle County, when farmland was beginning to be subdivided for residential development. The impetus was the end of World War II, phenomenal population growth, high employment rates, a general feeling of optimism about economic expansion, and an extensive and developed road network that made commuting possible. As G.I.s returned home and began families, a building boom occurred;

for the first time in history more Americans owned than rented houses (Clark 1986:193-199, 206). However, immediate postwar housing is not a major theme in the project region. One major post-World War II residential development falls partially within the project region, Fair Winds. Although the plat for Fair Winds dates to 1946, it cannot be accurately classified as a post-World War II residential development. Construction of houses within the subdivision proceeded slowly and continues to this day (Figures 9 and 10).

Residential buildings in the School Bell Road corridor from the post-World War II era are vernacular style frame buildings, with a variety of exterior treatments ranging from stucco and wood to synthetic siding and brick veneer. The housing stock reflects building styles commonly constructed in post-war New Castle County. After the Great Depression, land ownership and use patterns in the Upper Peninsula Zone changed as the agricultural economy of the area shifted toward increased commercialization and corporate capitalization. Increasing job opportunities in manufacturing and the industrial chemical sector diminished the predominance of agriculture. Suburban tract housing appeared on the landscape during this period, as many farmers found it more lucrative to sell or subdivide rather than farm their lands. Therefore, the significance of the historic resources located within the project APE was assessed in relation to two themes: Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change; and Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts (Herman *et al.* 1989:34-37).

The houses situated in the project area are modest examples of Cape Cod style and Ranch style dwellings. These styles of homes are commonly found in post-World War II residential areas throughout the United States. Numerous public opinion surveys showed that the Cape Cod and the Ranch were the most popular house styles that homeowners sought (Clark 1986:201). Therefore, the level of integrity required for NRHP eligibility should be high due to the large number of surviving examples.

The Cape Cod-style dwelling became popular in the early twentieth century as part of the Colonial Revival movement. The Colonial Revival, as an aesthetic movement, owes its popularity to a growing interest in early American decorative arts and architecture that emerged after the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. Through its associative values of patriotism, heritage, and American exceptionalism, American material culture bearing the influence of Colonial Revival style continues to be popular (Axelrod 1985; Rhoads 1977). Antecedents for the contemporary Cape Cod-style dwelling can be found in the seventeenth and eighteenth century examples of domestic architecture from the New England region. The massing of typical Cape Cod style houses consists



SOURCE: USGS 1953

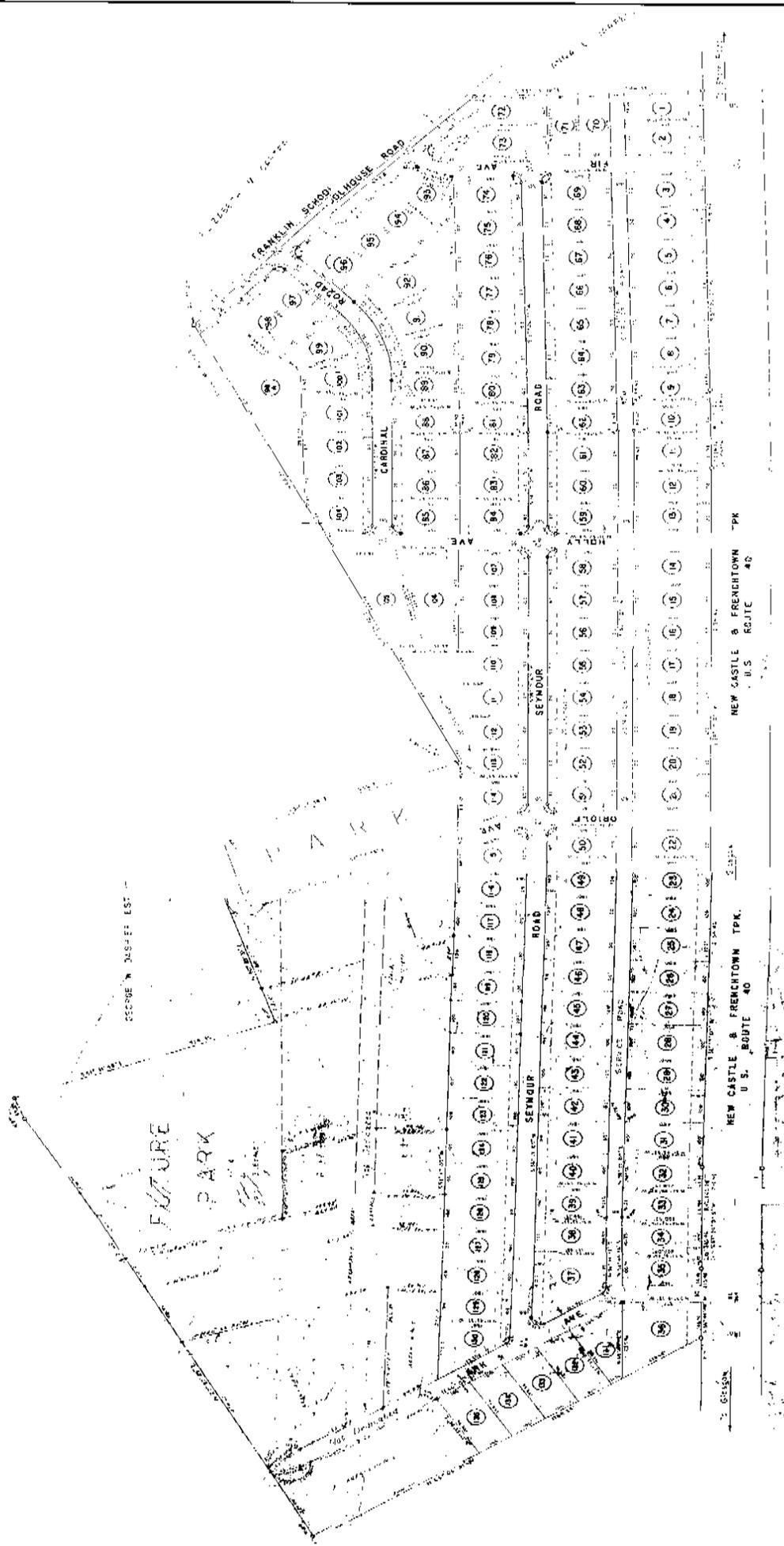
DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

SCHOOL BELL ROAD
 (S.R. 1 TO U.S. 40) IMPROVEMENTS
 NEW CASTLE HUNDRED
 NEW CASTLE COUNTY

1953 MAP OF PROJECT AREA

FIGURE - 9
 NOT TO SCALE

SKELLY and LOY Inc.
 CONSULTANTS IN
 ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY
 ENGINEERING - PLANNING



SOURCE: NEW CASTLE COUNTY PLAT BOOK 1946

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

SCHOOL BELL ROAD
 (S.R. 1 TO U.S. 40) IMPROVEMENTS
 NEW CASTLE HUNDRED
 NEW CASTLE COUNTY

FAIR WINDS, 1946 PLAT

FIGURE - 10
 NOT TO SCALE

SKELLY and LOY Inc.
 CONSULTANTS IN
 ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY
 ENGINEERING - PLANNING

of one-and-one-half stories in height and three bays in width. The main entry is usually located in the center of the facade to create the suggestion of bilateral symmetry. Typically, gable roof dormers pierce the plane of the building's gable roof.

The development of the Ranch style house owes its national ubiquity to the emergence of the California style in post-World War II American popular culture. For instance, the house designs of Cliff May, which were published in *Sunset* magazine in the late 1950s, extended the popularity of this house form across the United States. Typically, Ranch houses appear on building lots as one-story buildings with a rectangular plan and a low pitched roof silhouette, with either a hipped or gable type roof. Depending on the location of the extension or addition, Ranch house plans vary from L-shaped to T-shaped plans. Large picture windows and sliding glass doors leading out to patios characterize the type. Patios, large picture windows (also called window walls) are a crucial, character-defining feature of the type. Patios extended the living space outdoors into a partially enclosed space used for social and leisure functions, which evoke the California good life idiom (Clark 1986:211; McAlester and McAlester 2000:479-480).

The majority of the homes within Fair Winds have been altered, and either never included or they no longer contain the character-defining elements of their style. For instance, the modest examples of the Cape Cod style that occur in Fair Winds lack dormer windows, a key design element. In addition, the examples of the ranch style within the project APE lack patios and large picture windows or window walls. Other alterations include additions and replacement window treatments. None of the historic resources within the project APE are recommended as individually eligible for NRHP listing.

The NRHP evaluation of the historic resources within the project APE also considered the potential eligibility of Fair Winds as a historic residential suburb. Although the historic resources within the project APE illustrate a change in demographic and settlement patterns in the area's local history, they do not represent significant aspects of suburbanization. Other suburbs in the Wilmington area better represent suburban house types and the suburbanization of this city. Based on the National Register Bulletin *Historic Residential Suburbs* (National Park Service 2003), the historic resources within the project APE cannot be categorized as a historic residential suburb. According to the bulletin (National Park Service 2003:11), a historic residential suburb is "a geographic area, usually located outside the central city, that was historically connected to the city by one or more modes of transportation; subdivided and developed primarily for residential use according to a plan; and possessing a significant concentration, linkage, and continuity of dwellings

on small parcels of land, roads and streets, utilities, and community facilities." The various types of suburban neighborhoods that meet this definition include:

- planned residential communities;
- residential neighborhoods that through historic events and associations have achieved a cohesive identity;
- single residential subdivisions of various sizes;
- groups of contiguous residential subdivisions that are historically interrelated by design, planning, or historic association;
- residential clusters along streetcar lines or major thoroughfares;
- entire villages built along railroads, trolley lines, or parkways; and
- concentrations of multiple family units, such as duplexes, double and tripledeckers, and apartment houses (National Park Service 2003:11).

The Fair Winds subdivision is not eligible for NRHP listing under Criteria A, B, C, or D. The subdivision does not illustrate important aspects of suburbanization at the local, state, or national level. With its truncated rectilinear subdivision of land along the edge of a cultivated field, Fair Winds did not introduce important land use trends or design principles. Furthermore, the builders of the subdivision did not utilize emerging house construction techniques, such as mass production with prefabricated members. Rather, individual builders or the homeowners built on the lots.

Although the buildings are situated in a suburban setting, the neighborhood does not possess the physical features that would characterize it as a historic residential suburb. The neighborhood lacks a coherent site plan and overall landscape design. In its original plan, Fair Winds contained one main thoroughfare with four intersecting streets. This has been altered through the development of a second axis street. Further, the subdivision's original conception indicated the intention of including community facilities, such as a park, but it was never constructed. Instead, homes along Sparrow Lane and a new church were constructed at that location. Additionally, motels and modern commercial strip developments have been built within the original subdivision on U.S. 40, and new houses have been constructed throughout the subdivision, further compromising cohesion.

The neighborhood does not demonstrate innovation or high artistic quality in the areas of community planning, landscape architecture, or architecture. The influence of professional or innovative design concepts is not evident in Seymour's plat. Rather, the truncated rectilinear

subdivision of land into a strip along the roadway represents an expedient and common use of marginal farmland. Fair Winds does not represent the work of a notable community planner, landscape architect, architect, or engineer. It was developed by Lonzy W. Seymour, a trolley car motorman who later became a real estate agent. Fair Winds was the only subdivision he developed (Lonzy W. Seymour, Jr., personal communication 2003; U.S. Census 1930:11b).

The majority of buildings in Fair Winds lack integrity and distinctive elements of design and style. The Fair Winds subdivision is not NRHP eligible as a historic district. Although small-scale rectilinear subdivision occurred in the vicinity of Wilmington, Fair Winds made no contribution to the growth of Wilmington's urban fabric due to its remote location from the city (Chaseet *al.* 1993:28, 33-34).

Seymour's Fair Winds subdivision is not eligible for NRHP listing under Criterion D. The residences are not likely to yield significant information. Sufficient information about the materials and framing techniques employed in their construction exists in the secondary literature. Due to their construction in the latter half of the twentieth century, with its mechanical grading for building lot preparation, centralization of sanitary services, and installation of municipal utilities, the house lots do not possess wells, privies, or trash middens that would have created an archaeological record. The residences do not contribute to a fuller understanding of suburbanization, building practices, domesticity, or American social history.

3.8 Tourism and Development in the Project Region

The increasing number of travelers touring the United States in private cars and improvements to the highway system contributed to the development of the tourist service industry. What began as rudimentary tourist camps and municipal campgrounds with limited service facilities evolved into the motel industry after World War II (Belasco 1981:passim; Hoffecker 1988:183; Munroe 1984:203). The boom years of motel construction occurred in the immediate post-World War II era, motivated by many of the same factors that spawned suburbanization. Between 1939 and 1952, for example, the number of motels/motor courts jumped from 13,000 to 41,000. The motel industry during this era through the late twentieth century was also characterized by increasing franchise or chain ownership and standardization in design. The most common design employed during this era is now ubiquitous: a U-shaped complex with the office in the center.

Many early motels employed Colonial Revival-esque touches, to facilitate identification by a traveler on the highway (LeeDecker *et al.* 1992:299-301).

West of the project area, three motels fall within the original plat of the Fair Winds subdivision. The Fair Winds Motel, Afton Motel, and Motel West are located along U.S. 40 in the vicinity of the intersection of U.S. 40 with Fir and Holly avenues. They are one-story high and have been built on an L-shaped footprint. These motels within the Fair Winds subdivision are modest vernacular buildings that lack architectural distinction and historical significance.