

Chapter 4

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Cedar Neck Road Site is located in Cedar Creek Hundred, Sussex County, approximately two-and-a-half miles southeast of Milford and approximately one-and-a-half miles north of Cedar Creek. The land north of Cedar Creek was originally part of St. Jones County. When Kent and Sussex Counties were formed from St. Jones and Whorekill Counties in 1683, the Mispillion River was set as the boundary between the two new counties and the project site has lain firmly within Sussex County since that time (Scharf 1888:1200; Conrad 1908:693).

The earliest settlement in Cedar Creek Hundred was made in 1671 when Richard Perrott of Virginia patented a tract of 3,000 acres of land between Prime Hook and Slaughter Creeks (Scharf 1888:1247; Conrad 1908:693). Tracts within the project vicinity were taken up in the early 1680s. In 1681 Robert Hart patented 436 acres called “Mount Holly” on the north side of Cedar Creek; in 1682 800 acres were granted to Henry Skidmore; and in 1686 Thomas Skidmore and Thomas Williams were granted 970 acres (Hitchens 1976:34-35).

Cedar Creek, which flows eastward through Cedar Creek Hundred and empties into the Delaware River to the south of the Mispillion River, was particularly important to the early settlement and industrial development of the region. Cedar Creek offered the best advantages for mill seats, and more mills were built on this creek than any other watercourse in Cedar Creek Hundred (Scharf 1888:1253). Moreover, the creek was navigable as far as the “Brick Granary” which was located just south of the project site, near where modern SR 1 crosses Cedar Creek. The most sig-

nificant early settlement in the hundred, Cedar Creek Village, was situated just upstream from the Brick Granary. The village formed around Draper’s Mill, which was in operation by the early 18th century. At that time it contained several mills and over a dozen residences (Scharf 1888:1254; Conrad 1908:694). Thus, before Milford was laid out on the Mispillion River, Cedar Creek supported the main settlement and was the primary shipping point for the entire region (Scharf 1888:1247).

The town of Milford, located in both Kent and Sussex Counties, is divided into northern and southern sections separated by the Mispillion River. Like Cedar Creek, the Mispillion supported a number of mills, and the development of the milling industry spurred initial settlement. In 1787 the first mill was built in the vicinity of Milford and later that year land on the north side of the Mispillion was surveyed into town lots (Scharf 1888:1188, 1190). The forest surrounding Milford was known for the quality oak it produced and shipbuilding quickly became another important industry along the Mispillion. The shipbuilding industry was well established by the first quarter of the 19th century and. By this time, most of the shipping and mercantile business in Cedar Creek Hundred had shifted from Cedar Creek to Milford and the Mispillion (see below, Figure 4.1). By the 1880s there were at least three active shipyards in Milford and Cedar Creek Village was “but the skeleton of its former self” (Scharf 1888:1190, 1254).

The construction of the Junction and Breakwater Railroad in 1859 also encouraged the shift in industry and commerce away from Cedar Creek and towards Milford. Whereas some of the earliest roads in Cedar Creek Hundred passed close to the project site,

the Junction and Breakwater Railroad entered the Hundred at Milford and headed southward well to the west by way of Lincoln and Ellendale. The railroad was completed to its terminus in Rehoboth in 1869 and thus provided a direct connection from Dover to the Atlantic. In 1883, the railroad became part of the Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Railroad (Beers 1868; Scharf 1888:379, 432; Wilson 1899:326).

Modern road improvements in the 20th century allowed for additional development in northern Sussex County. In the early 20th century the DuPont Highway (U.S. Route 113) was built through Sussex County roughly paralleling the Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Railroad. This new road allowed for vehicular access to points north. In the late 1970s SR1 was built through Sussex County. Within the project vicinity, the new route was built along the alignment of what was then known as State Route 14 with additional lanes being added to the west of the existing road. With improved transportation infrastructure and ease of access to northern Delaware and the Atlantic Coast, northern Sussex County experienced much residential and commercial suburban growth at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

B. DETAILED HISTORY OF PROJECT SITE

The Cedar Neck Road Site is believed to be located on land first patented to Henry Bowman in the late 17th century or very early 18th century. The patent for the land was not found. It is not uncommon to encounter missing, or in some cases unrecorded, documents in the 18th-century Sussex County records. In 1704, after Henry Bowman's death, his property was sold to Charles Haynes (Sussex County Deed 1/208). Henry Bowman had multiple parcels of land and had his home farm on the Mispillion River, suggesting that his land in the Cedar Creek vicinity was occupied by a tenant. In 1731 Charles Haynes, identified as a car-

enter living in Dorchester County, sold the 250-acre property to Alexander Draper (Sussex County Deed 6/397).

The Drapers were a prominent landowning family in the area in the 18th century. "Draper's Mill," situated at Cedar Creek Village, was the earliest gristmill on Cedar Creek (Scharf 1888:1253). Alexander Draper's will, dated 1734, references his mills on the "county road at the head of Cedar Creek" (Sussex County Probate Files). This "county road," which roughly followed the course of modern SR 30/Cedar Creek Road adjacent to the project site, may have been part of the old King's Road that connected Sussex County to points north.

In 1732 Alexander Draper sold the property containing the Cedar Neck Road Site to Alexander Thompson (Sussex County Deed 10/349), who then sold the land in 1735 to Andrew Fullerton. In 1747 Fullerton sold the property to James Fisher. Fisher sold off part of the land but at his death, his daughter Esther, then married to Daniel Dingee, inherited the remaining 150 acres (Sussex County Deed 10/349).

How the land containing the project site passed to John Draper is unknown but he had acquired the property by 1807, for in that year he sold a six-acre piece to Job Hudson (Sussex County Deed 26/31). John Draper's ownership of the project site is reflected in a plat map surveyed by George R. Fisher for Benjamin Potter in 1825 in connection with a land division ordered by the Sussex County Orphans Court (Figure 4.1). The northern property line for Lot No. 3, with a bearing noted as north 50 degrees east, corresponds to the southern limit of Draper's lands, a boundary that is shown again two years later on a division map of Draper's property surveyed shortly after his death.

Upon John Draper's death, his widow, who subsequently married a Robinson, inherited one third of his estate. His daughter Eleanor, wife of Curtis

Beckworth, also received a third, as did another daughter Eliza Draper. The Orphans Court plat of John Draper's estate, surveyed in 1827, identifies two lots that passed to Beckworth via his wife (Figure 4.2). The parcel identified as Part of Allot No.1 is the same land recited in Sussex County Deed 42/292 whereby Beckworth later sells to Lemuel Shockley (see below). No house is shown on this parcel, but there is one depicted across the street on the west side of Cedar Neck Road/SR 30.

In 1831 Curtis Beckworth sold his 227-acre farm to Lemuel Shockley (Sussex County Deed 43/29). The tax assessment records from 1828 identify this property as being only 165 acres and Beckworth's "home farm" (but no deeds have been found to help explain the discrepancy in the acreage). Three years later, in 1834, Lemuel Shockley sold 203 acres of land to William Shockley, Sr. (Sussex County Deed 45/20) who, within three days, sold it to his son William Shockley, Jr. The elder Shockley had settled in Cedar Creek Hundred by the late 18th century and came to own several farms and mills in the area. During the American Revolution, he was a staunch loyalist who opened his home to British soldiers and Tories. William and his wife Elizabeth had a son, William Shockley, Jr. who was born on the home farm in 1806 as was William, Jr.'s son, William Shockley III, in 1827 (Reamy and Reamy 2007:247).

William Shockley, Jr. retained at least part of the 203-acre property acquired from his father until 1874, when he sold it to Jacob Stell (Sussex County Deed 85/207). It is William Shockley, Jr. who is shown as the property owner in the Beers atlas of 1868 (Figure 4.3).

Jacob Stell was a resident of New Jersey in 1874 when he purchased the Shockley property and then later the same year sold off 100 acres, including the project site, to William Shotwell, also of New Jersey (Sussex County Deed 85/209). William Shotwell died

soon after and his heirs sold the land in 1876 (Sussex County Deed 88/39). The new owner was Sophia Ricker of Rahway, New Jersey. John R. Prettyman of Sussex County Delaware acquired the 100 acres of land in 1902 (Sussex County Deed 144/509). John Prettyman sold this same tract to Larry and Linda Prettyman in 1909 (Sussex County Deed 183/54).

It is unclear whether the Shockley house shown in the Beers atlas of 1868 remained standing throughout this period. If it did, it was likely occupied by tenants during the period of Shotwell and Ricker ownership, but perhaps was owner-occupied by the Prettymans. Alternatively, perhaps the Shockley house was replaced by a new structure built by the Prettymans in the first decade of the 20th century. A house is shown in approximately the same location as the Shockley house on a map of 1918 published by the United States Geological Survey (Figure 4.4), which may or may not have been the 19th-century Shockley dwelling, but is very likely the building that still stands in this location today, just north of the project site. This house was surveyed in 2005 as part of a historic context study undertaken for the DuPont Highway (U.S. Route 113) and was evaluated as being of early 20th-century date (John Milner Associates, Inc. 2005 [CRS # S10315]). The possibility remains that the site of this house is the same as that of the Shockley house and that the core of the currently standing building includes 19th-century elements.

In 1923 Larry and Linda Prettyman transferred the 100-acre property to Elmer Wilkins (Sussex County Deed 238/506). Four years later, Wilkins sold the property, by now a tract of 104+ acres, to Lester Lovett (Sussex County Deed 265/169). Diamond State Nurseries purchased a number of pieces of land from Lester Lovett in 1952. The property containing the project site was one of six tracts and included over 104 acres of land (Sussex County Deed 417/54). Thawley Enterprises, the business entity of Brown Thawley, bought all six of these tracts, from

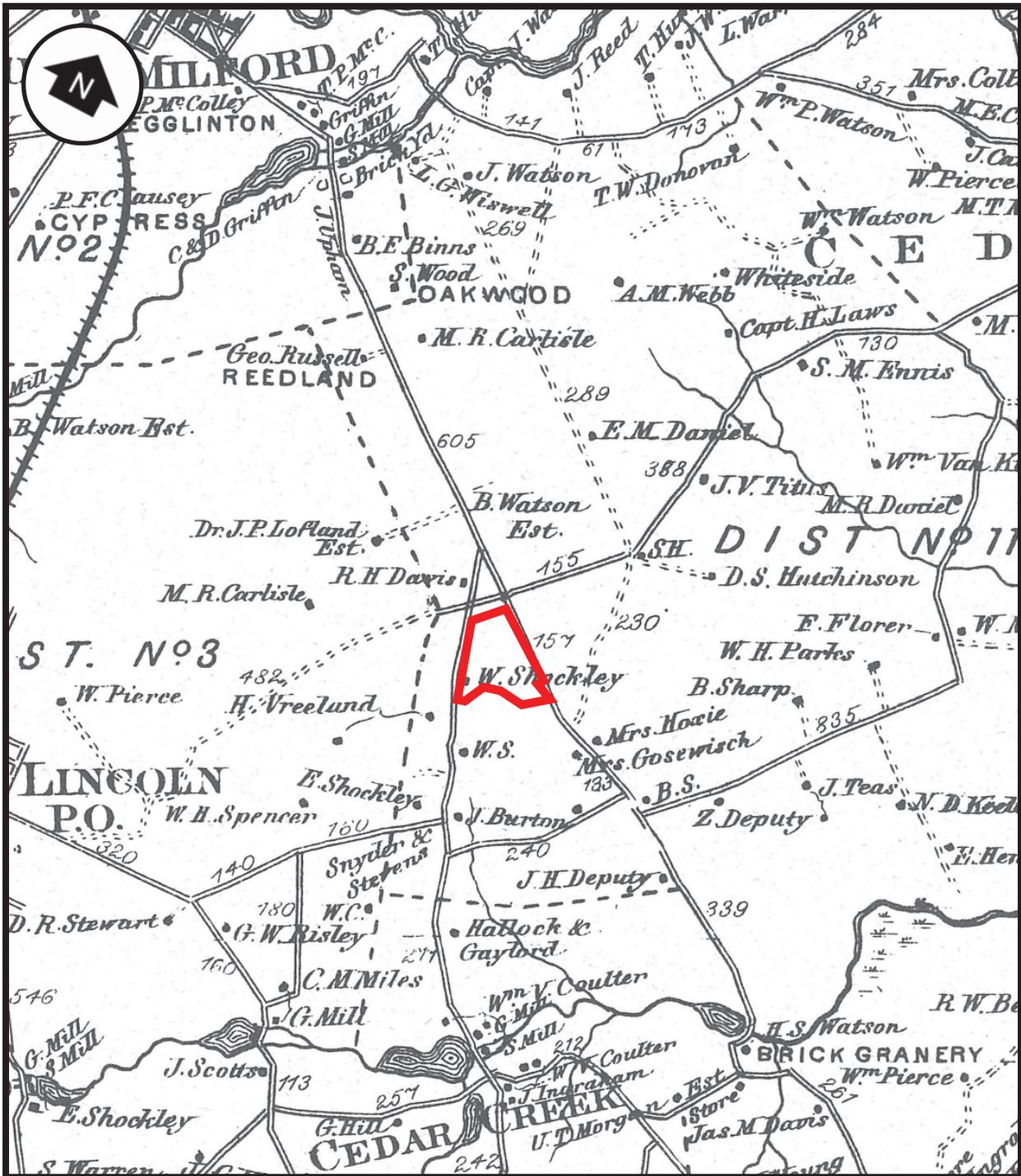


Figure 4.3. Beers, D.G. Atlas of the State of Delaware. 1868. Scale: 1 inch= 3000 feet (approximately). Location of project site outlined.

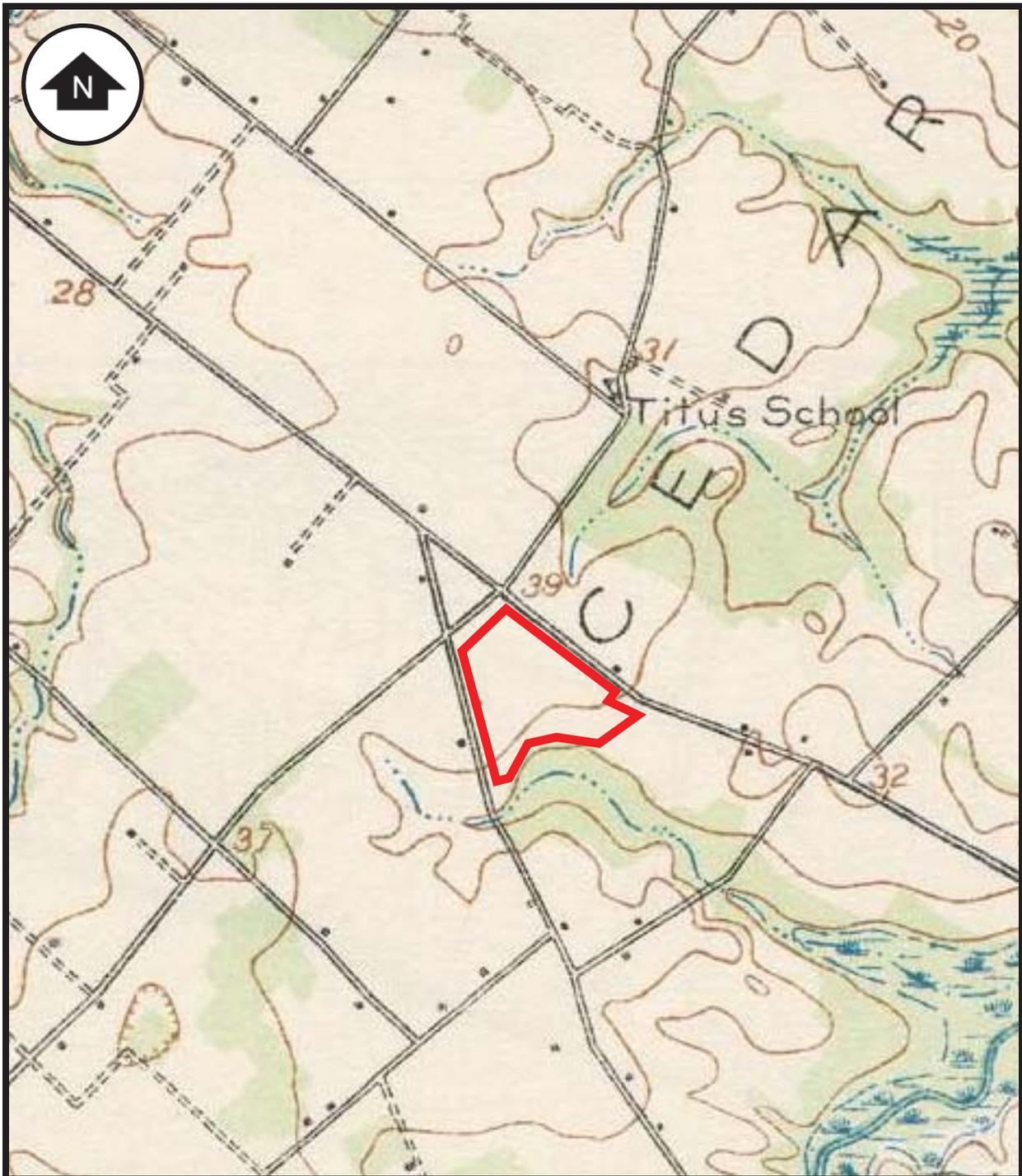


Figure 4.4. United States Geological Survey. Cedar Creek, Delaware Quadrangle. 1918. Scale: 1 inch = 1,600 feet (approximately). Location of project site outlined.

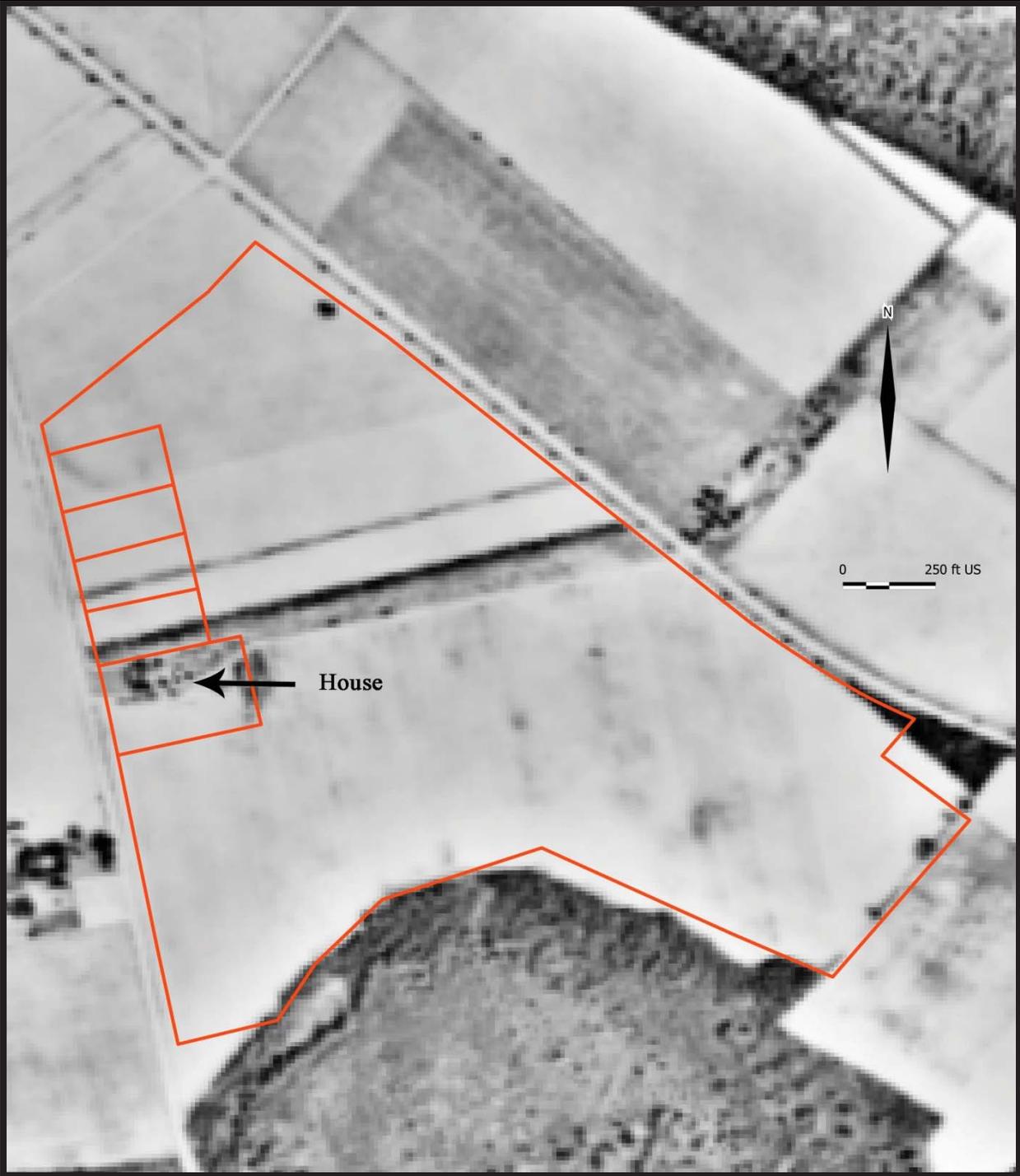


Figure 4.5. United States Department of Agriculture. Aerial Photograph of Project Site. 1937.

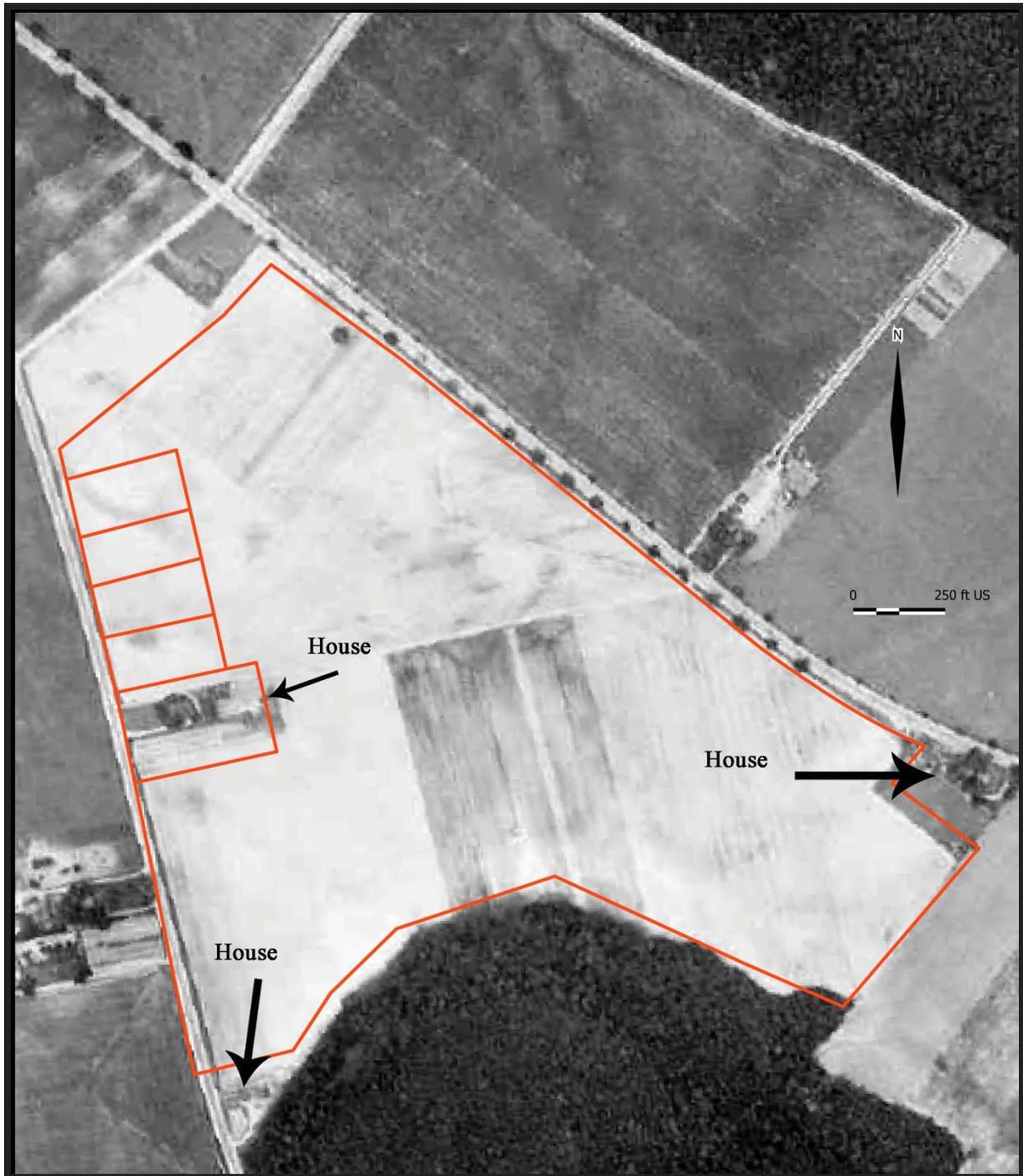


Figure 4.6. United States Department of Agriculture. Aerial Photograph of Project Site. 1954.

Diamond State Nurseries in 1959 (Sussex County Deed 504/357). The tract containing the project site was passed in 1975 to Sue Paquette after the death of Brown Thawley, Sr. and in 1979 she sold this property, consisting of about 70 acres, to Francis and Mary Lou Webb (Sussex County Deed 969/165). It was in 2002 that Francis and Mary Lou Webb sold the property consisting of 59.31 acres to W. Nelson Hall, trustee and owner of record at this time.

A review of 20th-century aerial photographs is helpful in tracing residential development in the project vicinity. In 1937 the United States Department of Agriculture compiled aerial photographic coverage of the entire state of Delaware, providing the earliest available direct image of the project site (Figure 4.5). In this image a single house, the dwelling noted above as being associated with the Prettymans (and perhaps with William Shockley), is located on the east side of SR 30 just to the north of the project site. When compared with an aerial photograph of 1954 (Figure 4.6), it is apparent that in the 17-year interval between the two photographs two houses were built or relocated close to the project site, one to the east next to SR 1, the other to the south on SR 30.

Later aerial photographs (not illustrated) show that between 1954 and 1961 a house was built at the southwest corner of what is now Wilkins Road and SR 1. By 1968 it was joined by a house at the southeast corner of SR 30 and Wilkins Road, and in the 1980s two other houses were built between these two above-mentioned dwellings. Three more houses were constructed on the east side of SR 30 in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (United States Geological Survey 1954 [1982]; Delaware Data MIL).