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WELDIN HOUSE (HUSBANDS PROPERTY) SUMMARY  
OPINION

FHWA KKS/HPG C.1  
WELDIN HOUSE

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**WELDIN HOUSE** N-4049  
**(Husbands Property)**  
**SUMMARY OPINION**

Submitted to:  
Delaware Department of Transportation

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## Introduction

KKFS has been requested to render an opinion on the National Register eligibility of the Weldin House (Husbands Property) at Faulk Road and Concord Pike in Blue Ball. The property had been evaluated in two previously prepared documents. The first of these reviews on the Weldin House, completed in 1980, is the "Cultural Resources Assessment - Concord Pike" prepared by Mid-Atlantic Archaeological Research, Inc., which found the house to have little historical significance but to be potentially eligible for the National Register based upon its associated outbuildings and the unusual expansion of building stages it represents.<sup>1</sup> The second document, the National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, compiled by The History Store and authored by Priscilla M. Thompson in 1985, found the Weldin House to be eligible under Criteria A and C.<sup>2</sup> The Thompson report based its evaluation on the significance of the house as the residence of the Weldin family, who made innovations in the plumbing industry in the Wilmington area during the early 20th century. For this association with an important local business, the site was considered to have importance in events which contributed to the broad patterns of history. In addition, the house was noted for its architectural significance as a late-19th-century vernacular rural house with expansions reflective of the growing prosperity of the Weldin family.

## Summary Evaluation

The KKFS Historic Preservation Group undertook additional archival research and a thorough site examination which included the surrounding resources, in order to prepare a comprehensive evaluation of the property's historical and architectural significance. Our study addressed the issues and recommendations presented in the previous investigations, yet pursued broader and more in-depth research including the site's early history, the 19th-century estate history of the Weldin family, and the 20th-century development of the Weldin plumbing firm.

The site of the Weldin House was part of a larger tract, the majority of which was located on the south side of Weldin Road, near the intersection with Faulk Road. The history of that tract on the south side of Weldin Road, which now contains archaeological ruins, dates back to the 18th century. The 1771 will of Joseph Mortonson mentions a dwelling house on the property<sup>3</sup>. Mortonson may have farmed the land, as well as being the innkeeper of the Blue Ball Tavern, which was located on a part of his lands located across Concord Pike. Mortonson's land was subsequently purchased by John Dickinson, a prominent local land owner and public figure. Because the ruins of the archaeological site reflect 18th-century agricultural developments and historical associations as John Dickinson's tenant farm, the immediate surrounds of the site appear to be potentially eligible under Criterion D. A thorough analysis of the site was completed in 1987 by Thunderbird Archaeological Associates for the Delaware Department of Transportation, confirming the site's significance.<sup>4</sup>

However, the late-19th-century Weldin House, which clearly post-dates the period of significance of the archaeological site, does not appear to be eligible for the National Register. The house is not eligible under Criterion A because its association with the Weldin plumbing industry is not significant. Not only the plumbing company, but also the residence of the family member most involved with the firm, were located in Wilmington, not Blue Ball. As an agricultural complex, the outbuildings have deteriorated and the setting has been altered with road widening and new construction such that it no longer has the integrity to convey events which contributed to the broad patterns of history. The

property is not eligible under Criterion B because as discussed in detail below, this was not the principal building associated with the Weldin of plumbing notoriety. Moreover, as an individual, Weldin does not appear to be so significant as to warrant National Register recognition for his associated building. Nor is the house eligible under Criterion C. Architecturally, the original vernacular house form is well-represented throughout Delaware. Its late Queen Anne addition is of some merit, yet a number of well-preserved farmhouses showing period additions exist in the immediate vicinity of the house. Criteria D does not apply to the Weldin property although it does point to the significance of the ruins across Weldin Road. The following evaluation will explain more thoroughly these findings on the Weldin House.

### Historical Documentation

The Weldin house sits on a tract of land originally belonging to "Chestnut Hill", the 18th-century, 200-acre tenant farm of John Dickinson. Dickinson purchased the property in 1785, then in 1786, acquired the land across Concord Pike known as the Blue Ball farm. John Dickinson, who was well-known in both Pennsylvania and Delaware politics, kept his residences in Wilmington and central Delaware and ran "Chestnut Hill" as a tenant farm. In 1804 "Chestnut Hill" was willed to his daughter, Maria Dickinson Logan, the wife of Albanus Charles Logan of Philadelphia. The buildings associated with the Dickinson/Logan property, now in ruins, are located south of Weldin Road just east of its intersection with Faulk Road. Few examples of the many tenant farms kept by prominent landowners during the 18th century exist in as stable a condition as the ruins on this property. Therefore, this site is of significant archaeological importance as the remains of an early agricultural site, later used as a tenant farm by a locally prominent family.

In 1862, the Dickinson/Logan estate sold the "Chestnut Hill" farm property to Jacob R. Weldin, a local hay and grain farmer who owned land immediately to the east of the "Chestnut Hill" tract. At the time of J.R. Weldin's acquisition, the only buildings on the land were those now in, or in proximity to, the ruins on the south side of Faulk Road. The structures are shown on both the 1868 Beers Atlas and the 1881 Hopkins Atlas and are described as a stone house and frame barn in the 1866 and 1885 tax assessments. Though a Talley family history (J.R. Weldin married Hannah Talley) states that the land was impoverished and the farm dilapidated at the time of acquisition from the Dickinson/Logan estate, Weldin successfully established a dairy farm there.<sup>5</sup> Upon Jacob R. Weldin's death, his estate was divided among his three children, Thomas Talley, Jacob Atwood, and Eliza. Thomas Talley Weldin, Sr., received 100 acres of the property but not the tract of land on which the Weldin House, the subject property, stands. However, in 1882, shortly after marrying Emma Naylor, he is said to have constructed a home at Faulk Road and Concord Pike.<sup>6</sup> The house's style and the region's atlases, which show a house being built sometime between 1881 and 1893, support this circa 1882 construction date. This house was built on land owned by his sister as part of the division of their father's estate. Eliza was declared incompetent and her estate was put under trusteeship. In 1896, Eliza's brothers, Thomas Talley Weldin, Sr., and J. Atwood Weldin bought Eliza's share of the "Chestnut Hill" farm from her Trustees.

After acquiring Eliza's estate, Thomas Talley and J. Atwood reconfigured their joint holdings with the latter receiving the old "Chestnut Hill" farm which contained at least two residences, a barn and outbuildings at that time.<sup>7</sup> J. Atwood and Eliza continued to reside at "Chestnut Hill" farm until Eliza's death in 1914. It is not currently known if Eliza and J. Atwood occupied the original 18th-century Dickinson/Logan residence or a later building on the property or if J. Atwood continued to live at "Chestnut Hill" after Eliza's death. As part of the reconfiguration of the "Chestnut Hill" farm parcel in 1896, Thomas Talley

Weldin, Sr., received the land that fronted Concord Pike, both north and south of Faulk Road, which included the house he had constructed in circa 1882.

Thomas Talley Weldin, Sr., following in the tradition of his father, established a successful farming, dairy, and stock raising operation, eventually expanding his farm to include outbuildings behind the Weldin House. The date of construction of these outbuildings is not known as they do not appear on the 1893 Baist Atlas. However, stylistically they appear to date from the late 19th century. In 1902, T.T. Weldin, Sr., sold a large parcel of his farm to the City of Wilmington for the Porter Reservoir which is still located east of Concord Pike and south of Faulk Road. Taken mostly from former pasture lands, this parcel significantly reduced the size of the farm. Shortly thereafter, he left the farming business to join in plumbing opportunities with his son, Thomas Talley Weldin, Jr.

Thomas Talley Weldin, Jr., was born in Blue Ball in 1886. His first employment was with a Wilmington heating and plumbing contractor, Harry S. Miller. In 1907, at 21 years of age, T. T. Weldin, Jr., "persuaded his father to join him in a partnership concern that was named T. T. Weldin & Son, contractors in heating, plumbing and allied projects",<sup>8</sup> with headquarters in Wilmington. In 1911, shortly after the company's formation, T. T. Weldin, Jr., moved from Blue Ball, establishing his residence in Wilmington.<sup>9</sup> It was his insight into the 20th-century demand for indoor plumbing and heating that brought success to the company which incorporated in 1929 under the name T. T. Weldin & Sons. At this time, T. T. Weldin, Jr., took over the presidency of the company from his father and his brother, Herbert Frederick Weldin became vice president. T. T. Weldin, Jr.'s significance in the plumbing profession is marked by his membership in the Master Plumbers Associations of Wilmington and Delaware and his presidency of the Plumbers Examining Board of New Castle County. T.T. Weldin, Jr., continued to reside in Wilmington. His father, however, remained in Blue Ball in the house he built in circa 1882 until his death in 1939.

The Weldin House and remaining acreage were devised by Thomas in his will to his three children. The estate was divided equally with his daughter, Eva Weldin Husbands, inheriting the house and adjacent land. Two-thirds of the Weldin parcel were sold in the 1960s for the development of Independence Mall, a multi-use commercial center. Current construction on the remaining third of the parcel is now nearing completion. Due to these divisions, as well as the 1902 Porter Reservoir transaction, the original setting of the Weldin farmstead has been drastically reduced and altered, thereby detracting from its integrity, and hence, significance as an agricultural resource. The widening of Faulk Road and Concord Pike have also taken frontage from the property, causing the driveway to be realigned and further altering the setting of the original house.

Architecturally, the Weldin House, sited on the corner of Faulk Road and Concord Pike, is an amalgamation of styles. There have been numerous alterations made to the circa 1882 farmhouse, including the Queen Anne addition, the 1920s Colonial Revival enclosed porch and the asphalt roof, which have considerably altered the massing and materials of the original building. The interior of the house has also been considerably altered through changes in plan, the removal of the original staircase, and the replacement of original character defining trim. Though unusual in its style and Queen Anne addition, farmhouses, such as the Weldins', are located throughout the region. Many of these can be traced back to the original landowners, some to other members of the Weldin family. They, too, are often expanded, with the growth of the building reflecting that of the family. On a few of the properties the existing outbuildings are also well-preserved reflecting dairy and farming operations. Though representative of a farming establishment, the remaining outbuildings on the Weldin property have been altered and in some instances, have suffered severe loss

of structural integrity. The garage, originally an open machinery shed with an overhang, has been altered by the infill of the overhang, and the installation of overhead garage doors. The north section of the barn is intact but in an advanced state of deterioration. The framing and roof of the southern section, which was originally stalls, have collapsed, leaving only the stone walls intact. The chicken house was constructed in the second quarter of the 20th-century and is a very common form and of no particular significance. Therefore, although the Weldin House has some distinctive architectural qualities it does not merit listing on the National Register. As stated earlier in the discussion of the historical significance of the property, the land has also been divided and developed by recent construction and the depletion of the agrarian land surrounding the house to prevent it from being significant as an example of a late-19th/early-20th-century farming/dairy establishment.

The Weldin House is not unique to its surrounds. The majority of the properties in the vicinity of the Weldin House are mid to late-19th-century vernacular farmsteads and Gothic Revival Downingsque houses. The atlas maps from this period, 1868, 1881, and 1893, show that the Weldin family had a number of  $\pm$  100-acre holdings as did the Talleys, whose farmstead on Wilson Road is intact with an impressive collection of outbuildings. The atlases confirm additional similar agricultural properties of which the Millers, the Peirces, and others still exist. Exceptions to the above properties which typify the land holding patterns for agricultural establishments in the area, are the better known Dupont (Nemours) Estate to the southwest of the Weldin House and Lombardy Hall to the north. The Dupont Estate, which was founded in the 18th century with the family's Eleutherian Powder Mills, is noted primarily for its 20th-century architecture. And Lombardy Hall, an 18th-century National Register-listed property, which once had a significant amount of associated acreage has had its property divided for a cemetery and other uses.

The Weldin House, in conclusion, does not appear to be eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion A as a representation of an 18th, 19th, and 20th century farmstead or for its association with the plumbing industry. Nor are the house's associations with an important individual or its architectural qualities of National Register caliber. However, the Dickinson/Logan connection to the farmstead is of note, as are the archaeological ruins on the other side of Weldin Road which deserve recognition.

## Footnotes

1. Randolph K. Taylor, et al. "Phase 1 Archaeological Investigations." FHWA Federal Aid Project M-1153(6). (Delaware: Delaware Department of Transportation, 1987) p. III-2.
2. Priscilla M. Thompson, "The Weldin House". National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. (Delaware: 1985) p. 8-1.
3. Taylor, p. 1.
4. Taylor, p. 3.
5. George A. Talley. A History of the Talley Family on the Delaware. (Philadelphia: Moyer and Leshner Printers, 1899) p. 178.
6. Thompson, p. 8-3.
7. Taylor, p. 6.
8. H. Clay Reed, Editor. Delaware: A History of the First State. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1947), p. 546.
9. Rev. W.S. Senter, Editor. Wilmington Directory and Annual Record. (Philadelphia: Sherman and Company, 1911).

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