

## **3.0 HISTORIC CONTEXT**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Nearly all the land within the project APE, historically a part of the hinterlands of Laurel, has been owned by only three families since ca. 1770. Robert Houston and his descendants were the first settlers in the area. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the Chipman family began acquiring land from the Houston family. They would own a gristmill and farmland until the mid-twentieth century. Since the mid-twentieth century, nearly all the land has been owned by members of the interrelated Lowe and Given families, who would develop recreational sites and residential lots and raise diversified crops to sell through a variety of means, including roadside stands.

### **3.2 Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730±)**

Settlement in Broad Creek Hundred advanced slowly prior to 1730 (Scharf 1888:1285). The remoteness of the location; empiric battles over control of the Delmarva Peninsula among Sweden, the Netherlands, and Great Britain; and competing claims to the land by the colonies of Maryland and Pennsylvania once English control was secured were factors limiting homesteading in the area. By 1666, enough settlements had been made on the Chesapeake Bay's Eastern Shore to establish Somerset County, Maryland, which included all land from the Virginia line to the Nanticoke River (Moore 1959). What settlements were present in what would become Broad Creek Hundred were located along Broad Creek and the Nanticoke River in the southwestern portion of the hundred. The navigable streams provided access to the Chesapeake Bay. Nearly all settlers to the area had migrated from Maryland or Virginia (Scharf 1888:1285). The area was characterized by forest lands lush with game and fruit and the already well-known Twelve Mile Cypress Swamp (Moore 1959). No architectural resources from this era remain in the project APE.

### **3.3 Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770±)**

Settlement increased in Sussex County and Broad Creek Hundred during this period, as more emigrants followed the rivers and streams into the area. One of the first priorities of the new settlers was to clear the land for farming and to build houses for shelter. The area's abundant timber resources provided the necessary raw materials for houses and agricultural

buildings. To exploit the resource, settlers established water-powered sawmills, which generally were post-and-beam buildings supporting an up-and-down saw. Getting sufficient head to power the mills was problematic, however. Although streams abounded, the flat topography generally did not provide the necessary fall to power a waterwheel. Consequently, settlers had to dam existing ravines to create millponds (Moore 1959).

Prior to 1770, Robert Houston had established a pond and sawmill within the current APE. Houston's sawmill was reported to have been located on the east bank of the stream that ran through the area, near what local residents today refer to as the "rust pond" (Graves 1974; Jamie Givens, personal communication 2005). The type of waterwheel employed is unknown, although one historian of Delaware milling argues persuasively that the Sussex County's "copious but relatively level streams...would have been best suited to turbines or undershot wheels, which depend upon flow and do not need high heads" (Heite 1992).

Houston's mill is said to have provided the lumber for the oldest extant building in the project APE, Old Christ Church. In 1770, Anglican settlers in Broad Creek Hundred petitioned to have a house of worship built in their settlement. The Maryland General Assembly collected a tax of 50,000 lbs of tobacco (then an important cash crop in the area) to build the "Chapel of Ease" in St. Stephany Parish, Maryland. Houston, the sawmill owner and a shipwright, built the new chapel between 1770 and 1772 out of heart of pine planks. The beautifully preserved church was listed in the NRHP in 1971. It features a tall-paneled pulpit, high-backed square pews, and a barrel-vaulted ceiling (Wilkie 1971; Ned Fowler, personal communication 2005).

### **3.4 Early Industrialization (1770-1830±)**

In 1775, colonial courts sided with Pennsylvania in its boundary with Maryland. The ruling officially placed Robert Houston's pond and sawmill within Broad Creek Hundred, Sussex County. With land claims no longer in dispute, a large number of settlers entered the hundred the following year from Pennsylvania and the upper portion of Delaware. Like their predecessors, these emigrants were primarily subsistence farmers, although the types of crops grown had changed. Tobacco, grown in large quantities in the early eighteenth century, was now largely replaced by corn and livestock, with more limited cultivation of wheat, oats, tobacco, and cotton (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:22; Herman *et al.* 1989:48; Scharf 1888:1285). Because most farming was for home consumption, there was very little use of slaves, and the bound and free black population of the hundred was very low (Hancock 1976:33).

The switch to corn and grains stimulated a need for gristmills to process the crops. Millponds that formerly supported a sawmill now might also run a gristmill, and new ponds and sawmills and gristmills were started as the swamplands were drained and the existing timber was cut down. The mills became the focal point of the local community (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:23). In Broad Creek Hundred and neighboring Little Creek Hundred, more than 30 ravines had been dammed by 1800, to furnish power for more than 50 mills (Moore 1959).

The profusion of mills were one factor behind town development in southwestern Sussex County. Laurel, formerly the site of a Nanticoke Indian reservation, was developed in the mid-eighteenth century as a shipping point for agricultural and timber products at the headwaters of Broad Creek. Streets and lots were laid out in 1789 (Laurel Chamber of Commerce n.d.).

In the hinterlands northeast of Laurel, land and mill ownership began to change. In 1807, the Houston family transferred 160 ac of land to John Chipman, whose family had migrated to the area from Massachusetts. Six years later, in 1813, Chipman acquired 171 additional acres of land from Littleton Houston. The amount of land held by Chipman was large by Lower Peninsula standards (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:22). The 1816 tax assessment for the hundred mentions for the first time a sawmill on Chipman's land (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1807, 1813, 1816). It is not known if he acquired an existing mill from the Houston family or erected a new one. In 1822, Chipman was listed as the proprietor of a sawmill and gristmill, perhaps in the same building. It was the first reference to a gristmill on Chipman's land (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1822). Presumably it ground corn, the hundred's staple crop.

### **3.5 Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880±)**

The project APE remained agricultural and rural during this era, as did much of Broad Creek Hundred and southern Sussex County. In 1850, more than half the total acreage in Broad Creek Hundred was listed as unimproved in the agricultural census, despite continuing efforts to convert swamp and forest lands to agricultural fields. Compared to Delaware's other two counties, farms in Sussex County's hundreds remained smaller and less productive, but agricultural reform had begun in the area. Corn remained the most popular crop by a large measure, but farmers had also begun to cultivate fruit, such as peaches, strawberries, and blackberries. This was particularly true following the completion of the Delaware Railroad down the state's spine in 1865. The railroad (later a subsidiary of the Pennsylvania Railroad) passed through Laurel, providing a high-speed transportation connection to heretofore distant urban markets such as Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, D.C. Farmers in Broad

Creek and surrounding hundreds turned increasingly to truck farming as a livelihood (Beers 1868; De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:24, 99; Hancock 1976:87-90; Herman *et al.* 1989:54).

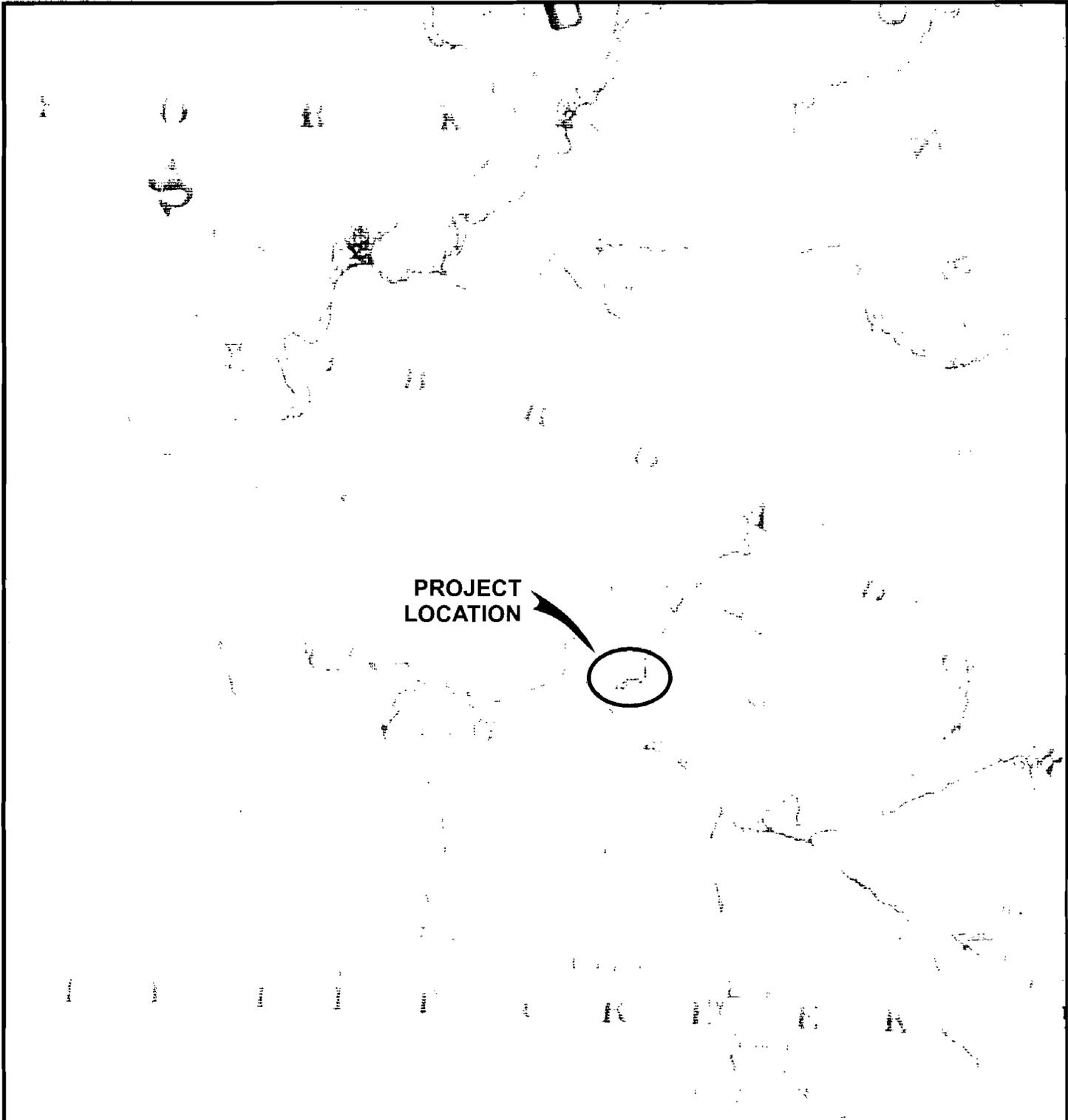
The general overview of Sussex County history is reflected in the transition and changes to Chipmans Mill during the Industrialization and Early Urbanization period. At the beginning of the period, in 1832, John Chipman's son Joseph acquired and continued to operate his father's sawmill and gristmill (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1832), an indication that the area's timber and traditional agricultural crops continued to dominate the local economy. An assessment from a few years later (1836) noted, however, that Chipman's 171 ac home farm supported a sawmill, a gristmill, and a "factory" (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1836). This enigmatic reference is not explained further, and does not appear on future assessments. In all likelihood, it refers to some sort of home-based production, which many farmers engaged in to supplement their subsistence living (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:87).

A notable change occurred on the Chipman land at mid-century. Although an 1849 map of Sussex County shows a gristmill and sawmill in operation (Price and Rea 1850) (Figure 4), *ca.* 1850, Joseph Chipman's son John stopped operating the family gristmill. The 1850 Census of Manufactures lists Chipman as the proprietor only of a sawmill. Chipman had \$1,000.00 invested in the mill, had purchased 1,500 logs at a cost of \$700.00, and produced 150,000 board feet of lumber valued at \$900.00. The water-powered mill employed two males and no females (U.S. Census 1850). The absence of the gristmill is supported by the 1868 atlas of Delaware (Beers 1868).

Chipman's reasons for closing the gristmill are not known, but there are clues in the historical record. Milling was an important part of Broad Creek Hundred's economy. In 1850, there were 29 sawmills and five gristmills located in Sussex County's 11<sup>th</sup> Subdivision.<sup>1</sup> The preponderance of sawmills perhaps indicates that, at this point in its development, western Sussex County had a greater need for sawmills than gristmills, and that local farmers could get their corn ground elsewhere. Simply put, it may not have been economical for Chipman to continue to run the gristmill. A second clue can be found in Chipman's 1852 tax assessment. In addition to the sawmill, Chipman now also operated a wool carding machine (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1852). Like the sawmill, it was water powered, and probably operated off the same millrace. In 1860, Chipman had invested \$500 in the carding mill. His one carding machine processed 5,500 lb of wool into 5,000 lbs of roll cloth, valued at \$2,500. The carding mill employed two males (U.S. Census 1860).

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<sup>1</sup> This listing may not show all mills in the 11<sup>th</sup> Subdivision. In order to be listed in the Census of Manufactures, production at a mill had to be at least \$500 annually (GAI Consultants, Inc. 2004:40).



**PROJECT  
LOCATION**



SOURCE: PRICE AND REA 1850

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	
BRIDGE 362 AT CHIPMANS POND BROAD CREEK HUNDRED SUSSEX COUNTY	
<b>PROJECT AREA IN 1850</b>	
FIGURE - 4 NOT TO SCALE	SKELLY and LOY Inc. CONSULTANTS IN ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY ENGINEERING - PLANNING



The establishment of the wool mill meant that someone in the area, perhaps Chipman himself, was raising sheep. Sheep were, in many ways, ideal livestock for intensively farmed western Sussex County. Sheep subsist on forbs and grasses and, compared to cattle, require small amounts of pasture land. They could easily be raised for their meat and fleece on the more marginal portions of Sussex County farms.

The 1860 Census of Manufactures indicates just how much the nature of milling, and by extension the economy, had changed in Broad Creek Hundred. The number of sawmills had declined dramatically, from 29 to nine. This would seem to indicate that much of the land had been cleared and could be cultivated for crops. The number of gristmills had remained essentially the same (a decrease from five to four); there was also one barkmill and Chipman's wool carding mill.

The 1868 map of Broad Creek Hundred provides a good view of the geographic trends in mill locations (Beers 1868) (see Figure 4; Table 1). Of the 13 mill seats illustrated, six supported more than one mill. Such was the case for John Chipman, who was shown as operating a sawmill and carding mill.

**Table 1.**  
**Broad Creek Hundred Mills in 1868**

<b>MILL TYPE</b>	<b>OWNER/OPERATOR</b>
1. Sawmill	D.H. Hudson
2. Sawmill	E. Elliott?
3. Sawmill and Gristmill	G. West?
4. Sawmill	J.W. Cannon
5. Sawmill	Warrington & Company
6. Sawmill and Gristmill	Taylor & Hitchens
7. Sawmill and Carding Machine	J. Chipman
8. Sawmill and Gristmill	J.B. Lewis, Merchant Miller
9. Sawmill	??
10. Unlabeled Mill Seat	Mrs. M.A. Collins
11. Sawmill	F. Taylor
12. Sawmill	Ellegood & Phillips
13. Sawmill and Gristmill	G.H. Vincent

John Chipman was again reported as owning a sawmill and a carding machine in the 1870 census (U.S. Census 1870). In addition, Broad Creek Hundred now had nine gristmills (which supports the theory that corn production may have increased), eight sawmills, and one woolen mill. Table 2 provides the data on Chipman's mills in 1870.

**Table 2.**  
**1870 Census Data on Chipman's Mills**

	<b>SAWMILL</b>	<b>CARDING MACHINE</b>
Investment	\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Motive Power	Water, 6 ft Head	Water
Horsepower Produced	20 HP	15 HP
Hands	1 male over 16 years	2 males over 16 years
Annual Wages Paid	\$100.00	\$175.00
Months in Operation Full-time	8 months	5 months
Annual Product	100,000 board ft	Carded wool
Value Annual Product	\$1,000.00	\$2,300.00

Chipman is not listed as a mill owner in the 1880 manufacturing census for Broad Creek Hundred (U.S. Census 1880). This is consistent with the Laurel City directories, which identify him as a sawmill owner between 1872 and 1877, but contains no listing for him in 1879-1880 (reported in Hancock 1983:355, 357, 359, 361). John Chipman either no longer found sawmilling or wool carding profitable, or he died or moved.

In addition to operating mills, the Chipman family were farmers who worked and rented farms in the area. By the mid-nineteenth century, John Chipman's original land holdings had been divided among heirs and relatives. To the east of Christ Church and the intersection of Chipman Pond Road and Sandy Fork Road, a Joseph Chipman (not the mill owner) had built a farmhouse on the north side of the road. The two-story, center hall plan I-house reflected the more complex house plans that had begun to be built in the hundred during the 1830-1880 period (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:90, 189) His brother, Ernest, established and operated a farm on an adjoining parcel to the east, with his farmhouse on the south side of the road (Quinn 1987:7). The Ernest Chipman farmhouse is outside of the project APE.

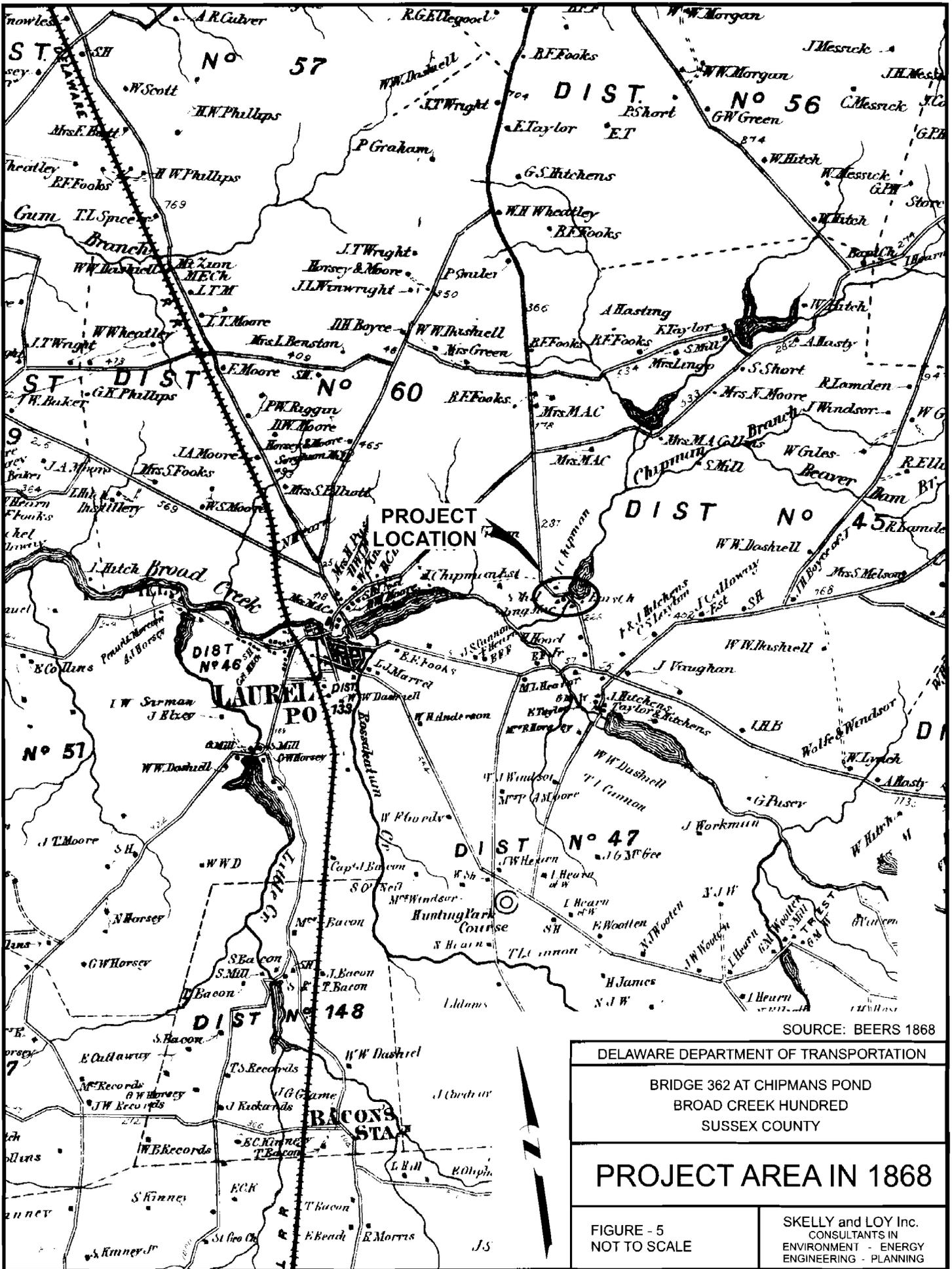
### 3.6 Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940±)

The Chipman sawmill and carding machine did not stay idle long. In the 1880s, William Chipman took over the businesses and expanded the operations. In April 1881, the *Delaware State Journal* reported that “William C. Chipman and Bro. will soon build a grist mill” (Hancock 1983:287). The Chipman gristmill, the second on the site, was completed in 1884. Scharf’s contemporaneous *History of Delaware* described the resources it called Chipmans Mills: “The present grist-mill was built by the present proprietor in 1884, and has the capacity of fifty bushels per day, the carding machine seventy-five pounds, and the saw-mill eight hundred feet” (Scharf 1888:1292). William and his brother John C. also continued to operate the sawmill and carding machine, at least for a time, but with the death of John C. Chipman, the sawmill ceased operation ca. 1890 and the carding machine about 1900 (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1884, 1892, 1900). The gristmill would operate into the mid-twentieth century under the ownership of a variety of Chipmans. The project area as it appeared in 1915 is shown on Figure 5.

Chipman’s water-powered gristmill was located on the west bank of the stream, just to the south of the mill dam. The dam carried the dirt public road that ran through the area, with a bridge carrying the road over the millrace. “Combination dam-bridge structures were the rule, rather than the exception, in Delaware, because of a state law that required the county to build and maintain bridges over mill spillways crossed by public roads” (Heite 1991). The gristmill apparently used a turbine to drive the millstones (Graves 1974). The use of a turbine rather than a waterwheel in 1884 was not surprising. Many Delaware mills switched to the more efficient water turbines in the mid-nineteenth century as a means of increasing yield.

Accounts of the gristmill indicate it underwent changes during its approximately 65 year existence. According to the NRHP nomination, the mill’s east end, which sat over the millrace and stream and which housed the turbine and milling equipment, was never altered. The mill’s west half, however, was reportedly moved from another location in the early twentieth century (Norton and Nelson 1977). Because nothing currently remains of the gristmill except its foundation, this information could not be confirmed.

The mill also survived a natural event that dramatically affected mills in the hundreds surrounding Laurel. In August 1933, heavy rains swelled area streams and millponds. According to a local informant, the flood destroyed nearly all the dams in the Laurel area (Kendall Jones, personal communication 2005). At Chipmans, however, “the dam was cut to save the dam and mill” (Moore 1959). A long-time resident of the area who was born and raised on the farm behind the church stated that the dam was either destroyed or breached because



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	
BRIDGE 362 AT CHIPMANS POND BROAD CREEK HUNDRED SUSSEX COUNTY	
<b>PROJECT AREA IN 1868</b>	
FIGURE - 5 NOT TO SCALE	SKELLY and LOY Inc. CONSULTANTS IN ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY ENGINEERING - PLANNING

“her father rebuilt it” (Alice O’Neal, personal communication 2005). It is assumed from these statements that the dam was deliberately breached to save it from being overtopped and washed away along with the mill. It is further assumed that the reinforced concrete bridge and reinforced concrete race and spillway currently present at the site of the mill dates from after the August 1933 flood. Corroborating evidence, although it is not conclusive, is a federal New Deal Works Progress Administration photograph dated to ca. 1936. The photograph shows the northeast corner of the mill and a reinforced concrete bridge that carried the road over the milldam. The bridge looks new (Plate 1; Willard Stewart Collection ca. 1936). It also has on it the supports used to raise and lower the millrace and overflow gates, which controlled water flow and which are still on the bridge today. A map view of the overall project area ca. 1940, showing the mill building and dam, is presented as Figure 6 (USGS 1944).

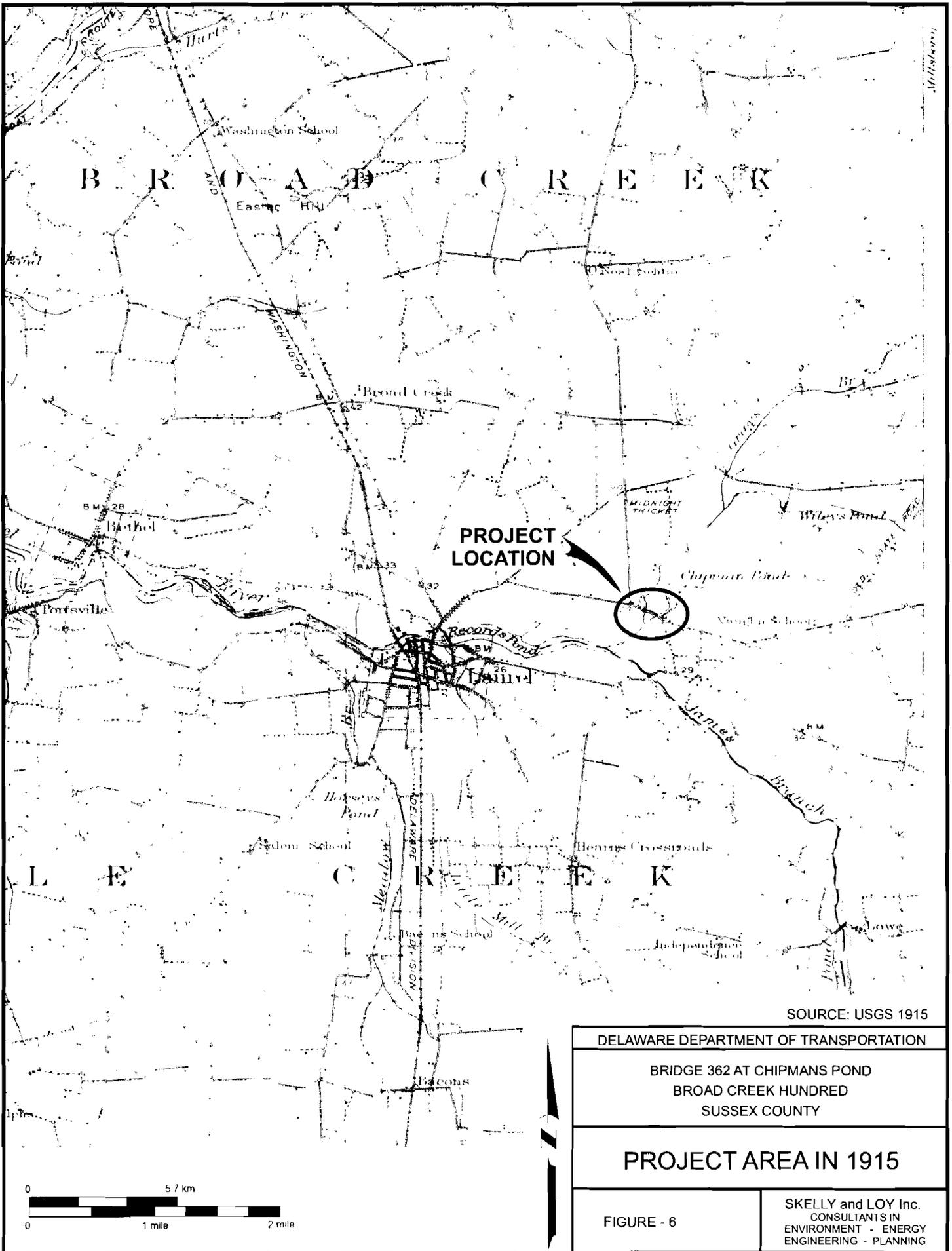
Chipmans gristmill was a custom mill that ground grains, chiefly corn, for local farmers. Custom mills continued to play an important role in the economies of Broad Creek Hundred and Sussex County, which remained largely agricultural during this period. Prior to ca. 1925, general farming still dominated in the county, with corn and wheat continuing to be the principal crops. Increasingly, however, farmers were turning to truck farming, producing vegetables, principally potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, and strawberries, for urban markets (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:30, 130, 133-136; Hancock 1976). Sussex County became particularly known for its sweet potato production, which was a major cash crop in the southwestern portion of the county between 1900 and 1940 (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:152). A sweet potato house, built in 1913 by Joseph Chipman as part of his farm operations, remains in the project APE. The Chipman Potato House was listed in the NRHP in 1990. Joseph Chipman, consistent with historical trends, also raised corn, peas, tomatoes, cucumbers, cantaloupes, and strawberries (Quinn 1987:7).

Sussex County’s agricultural economy underwent a revolutionary change during the 1920s with the development of the broiler industry. In 1923, Mrs. Wilmer Steele of Ocean View sold her brood of 500 chickens before they had fully matured. Her success inspired other farmers to follow suit. With chicken raising assuming greater magnitude, corn, along with soybeans, took on added importance as chicken feed (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:123; Hancock 1976:100-103).

Transportation improvements helped make truck farming and broiler raising more appealing. The completion of the innovative Dupont Highway from one end of the state to the other between 1903 and 1924 provided farmers with a first-class automobile trunk route to compliment the Delaware Railroad. The formation of the Delaware State Highway Department (SHD) in 1917, combined with dramatically increased state assistance for county roads in 1919



*Plate 1. Chipmans Mill: mill, dam and bridge, and pond ca. 1936 (from Willard Stewart Collection ca. 1936).*



SOURCE: USGS 1915

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BRIDGE 362 AT CHIPMANS POND  
 BROAD CREEK HUNDRED  
 SUSSEX COUNTY

PROJECT AREA IN 1915

FIGURE - 6

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

and the SHD's emphasis on consolidating and improving the primary and secondary road systems between 1926 and 1935, ensured that farmers would have good roads to move products to market (Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers, Inc. 2000:12-14).

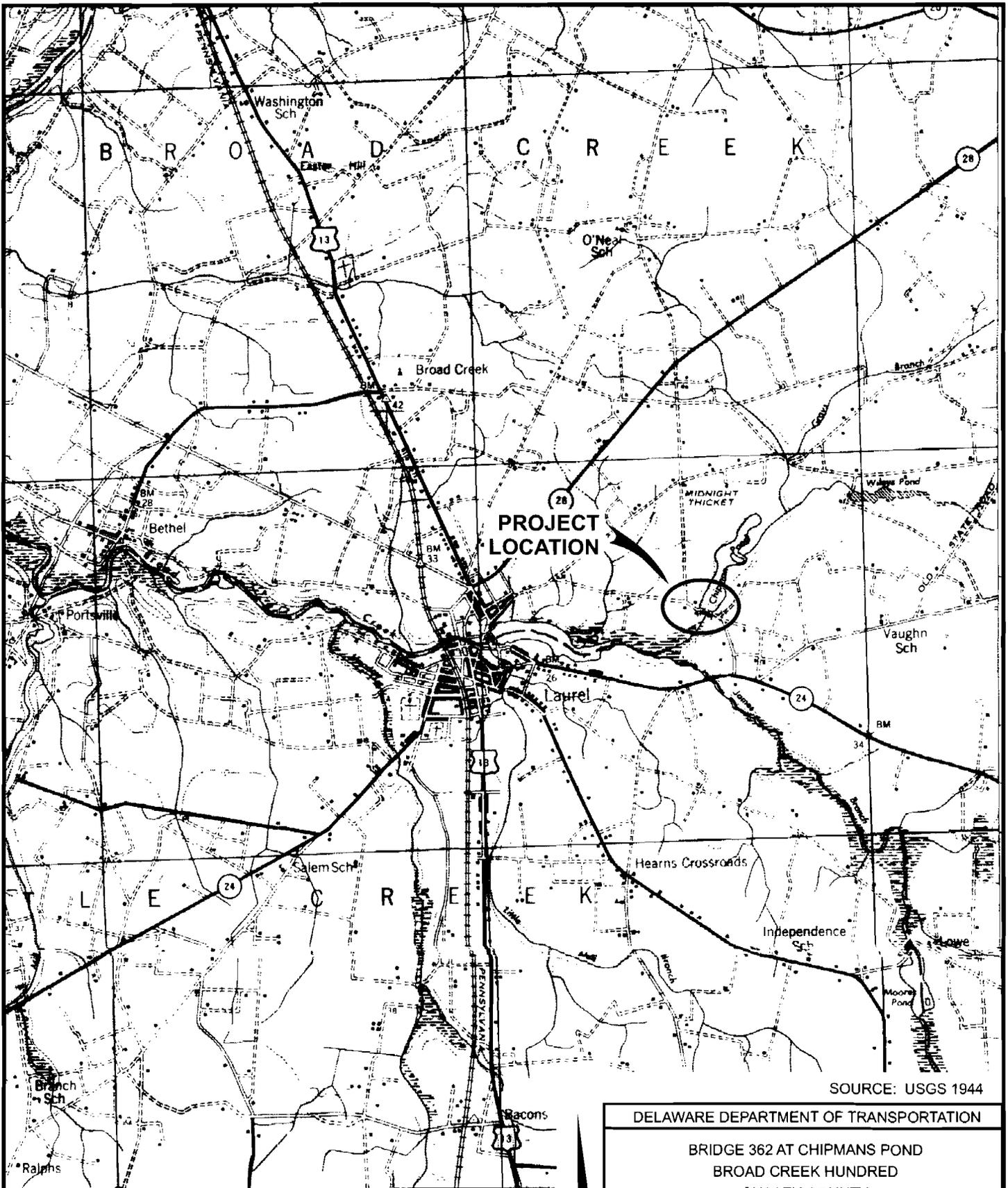
The increased emphasis on truck farming and broiler raising benefited the Chipman gristmill. For the last 25 years of its existence, Chipman's gristmill almost exclusively ground corn for chicken feed. The Chipmans also raised broilers, sweet potatoes, and fruit crops (Jamie Givens, personal communication 2005). A broiler house, later adapted to a new use, remains in the project APE, west of the existing bridge.

### **3.7 Suburbanization and Exurbanization (1940-Present)**

Chipmans Mill ceased operations in either 1948 (Moore 1959) or 1951 (Graves 1974). The mill, millpond, millseat, and 205 ac of surrounding land left the Chipman family in 1951 (Sussex County Deeds 1951). They were sold by Elwood Chipman to Carlton Lowe, who had managed the gristmill between 1938 and 1950. Two years previously (1949), Chipman and Lowe had developed a small tract of his holdings just west of the mill and across the road into four residential lots (Sussex County Plat Books 1949). At about the same time (1950), Carlton's brother, Donald, and his wife, Sturges, purchased the Joseph Chipman farmstead at the east end of the APE for their family home. Thus, in the mid-twentieth century, nearly all the land holdings within the APE transferred from the Chipman family to the Lowe family. The Lowes and their descendants retain nearly all the land in the APE.

Carlton Lowe also developed a portion of his lands surrounding the millpond into a campground, receiving his first permit to do so in 1952 (Jamie Givens, personal communications 2005). The project area, including the mill, millpond, beginning of the campground facilities, and new residences, is shown on Figure 7 (USGS 1955). As part of the transformation, the broiler house would be turned into the campground's shower facility.

The transformation of the pond from an active part of a mill operation to a recreational facility was in keeping with historical and demographic trends in Sussex County. During the Suburbanization and Exurbanization era, farming in Sussex County was both decreasing as a percentage of the overall economy and becoming more specialized, with greatest emphasis placed on broiler production (Hancock 1976:100-103). As the demand for milling services decreased, the water-powered Chipmans Mill could no longer compete with centralized, steam-powered gristmills. Millponds like Chipmans, however, were ideal venues for swimming, boating, and camping, and evidence suggests a number were converted to recreational use (GAI Consultants, Inc. 2004:57). In the years following World War II, Americans had more



SOURCE: USGS 1944

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	
BRIDGE 362 AT CHIPMANS POND BROAD CREEK HUNDRED SUSSEX COUNTY	
<b>PROJECT AREA IN 1944</b>	
FIGURE - 7	SKELLY and LOY Inc. CONSULTANTS IN ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY ENGINEERING - PLANNING

disposable income and were placing a greater emphasis on leisure and travel. Improved roads, eventually including the Interstate Highway System, made automobile travel easier. Lowe's campground, which would grow to include bungalow colonies, trailer and motorized camper sites, and tent camp sites, serviced this travel and leisure market (LeeDecker *et al.* 1992:297-298). Lowe's Lake View Recreation Area would grow to become one of Delaware's largest inland camping areas (Lynch 1981). To supplement the campground's income, Lowe also grew fruits and vegetables on his land to sell to campers, other travelers, and local residents. This was done in a store, erected in the 1960s, that also sold sundries (Jamie Givens, personal communication 2005).

Chipmans Mill remained in place for many years after its closing, a relic of an earlier time. In 1978, the mill building was listed in the NRHP for its significance in local industry (Norton and Nelson 1977). In 1987, the building was destroyed by arson. Remaining today are some foundations, the concrete bridge, the millrace, and the millpond and spillway.

The Chipmans Pond Road APE contains resources ranging in age from the eighteenth through the late twentieth centuries. With the exception of Old Christ Church, which is associated with Robert Houston (the first owner of the millpond), all resources are linked to the Chipman and/or Lowe families.