3. Background History

THE PROJECT AREA is a stretch of highway between Route 13 and Route 10 in North Murderkill Hundred (FIGURES 1-3). Improvements will be confined to the existing right-of-way .

PREHISTORY

Mammoths, musk ox, horses, caribou, and walrus provided food for dire wolf, short-faced bear, and other predators. Man was among the smaller competitors in the tundra food chain, but his skills compensated for his physical shortcomings. Nomadic people of this Paleo-Indian period were among the most skilled makers of stone tools in the world. They would travel great distances to quarry the best flinty cobbles from which they made exquisite spearpoints, knives, and small tools.

Paleo – Indian hunting – gathering society lasted until about 6,500 BC, when the Atlantic climate episode and the Archaic period of prehistory began (Custer 1984:31). Northern hardwood forests had replaced the tundra, the ocean had risen, and the climate was warmer. Pleistocene megafauna were replaced by smaller game, which required different hunting techniques and tools.

Archaic people fashioned tools made of quartz, a material that is less tractable than the flinty materials that Paleo people had favored. Ground stone axes and other heavy tools appear during this period.

By 3,000 BC, prehistoric society was decidedly different. Because people had stopped moving around so much, regional cultural differences began to appear in the artifact assemblages. Sedentary lifestyles ultimately led to horticulture, complex religious practices, and the accumulation of more, less portable, material goods.

The last prehistoric period, the Woodland, is characterized by larger groups of people living together in villages, using pottery and other heavy or fragile goods that would have been difficult to move from place to place. Woodland people tended to form more or less permanent settlements at places with abundant multiple resources. They sent out hunting parties, but they seldom dispersed whole populations to live off the land in the manner of their hunter-gatherer ancestors.

People of the Woodland period were the ones who met the first European settlers on the Delaware coast. Unaware of the natives' long history, descendants of these European settlers long assumed that the Woodland period culture reflected native lifestyles throughout prehistory.

Only during the present century has archæology revealed the rich variety and long time-span of Delaware's prehistoric cultures during the twelve millenia from glacial times to contact. After European contact, native culture faded away, until little remained in the consciousness of the people.

CONTACT PERIOD

The contact period is the time of initial interaction between European colonists and Native American residents. It begins with the first, indirect experience of Delaware Native Americans with European trade goods and diseases and ends with near-disappearance from Delaware of Native Americans as recognizable cultural groups.

It is likely that contact sites will not be easily distinguished from sites of the Woodland II period and European-American sites of a slightly later period. Less than ten confirmed or suspected contact-period sites have been catalogued in Delaware.

COLONIZATION

The area now known as Kent County was part of the Dutch Zwaanendael patroonship grant of 1630, which extended from the mouth of Delaware Bay to Bombay Hook. On this huge tract, the Dutch erected only tentative settlements, most concentrated near the mouth of the Bay. By the time the Dutch lost their colony to the English in 1664, the St. Jones watershed remained unsettled.

Even though the area was not colonized during the Dutch period, several of the leading families in the vicinity bore Dutch ancestry, including such families as Loockerman, Comegys, and Boyer.

After the English takeover, settlers from Virginia and New England came into Kent County; among the Virginians were some who proposed around 1670 to establish a town at the mouth of St. Jones River. Their effort failed, and Kent County was without a proper central place settlement for another fifty years, and forty years after the county's court was established in 1680.

William Penn's accession in 1682 sparked a new land rush, as his Quaker associates moved into the Delaware Valley in large numbers.

Under the Dutch and the Duke of York, local courts had taken charge of parcelling out the unclaimed land, but the new proprietor soon concentrated authority in his own land office at Philadelphia. The ensuing period was marked by large grants to Philadelphia merchants and speculators, including members of the Penn family, who effectively controlled the interior of Kent County for another century.

The area now encompassed by North Murderkill Hundred has been settled by European-Americans since the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Settlement began along Wolf Creek, later renamed St. Jones, soon after the English takeover.

By 1680, claimants had taken up land along St. Jones Creek [Dover River] as far up as the head of tidewater at the present site of Dover. According to a census taken at that time, the sixteen families living along the St. Jones included 45 people, the largest population of any valley in the new jurisdiction. One of these settlers was Isaac Webb, with two persons in his family. His property, Shoemaker's Hall, became the mill lands known later as Mount Vernon or Moore's mill.

MILLING ALONG ISAAC'S BRANCH

Although it is only about five miles long, Isaac's Branch has driven as many as four mills simultaneously (FIGURE 2). Two of the four former water power impoundments survive, one with a mill complex still in place.

The next mill above Moore's Lake was Howell's Mill, across the branch from the present Rodney Village.

In 1746, John Hill applied to the court for permission to build a mill near his house on Isaacs Branch. He owned a house on the north bank, where he wished to build the mill, but required condemnation of land on the south side. He was allowed to condemn two acres, for which he had to pay £3 (Record Group 3805, Delaware Archives).

According to secondary sources, this became the Howell mill seat, which was based in a mill on the south bank of the stream (Angermeier and Goggin 1984:42).

The mill seat was deeded by James Clayton to Thomas Hanson and Joshua Gregg, millers, in 1761, for the purpose of building a mill. Gregg signed over his share in the mill to Hanson, whose heirs, the Howells, have owned it ever since.

After the dam washed out in a storm, the mill seat was abandoned about 75 years ago. The mill was demolished and the machinery sold during a wartime scrap drive. The last Hanson descendant has granted the site to the county for park purposes, and there are proposals to redevelop the pond as a park.

The Camden Mill, now known as Wyoming Mill, is said to have been built in 1734 by John Clayton, who gave it to his son, John, in 1738 (Angermeier and Goggin 1984:42). A tract called "Mill Square" was claimed by John Clayton in 1735.

It was later owned by well-known persons, including Dr. Isaac Jump. William Lindale, who owned the mill during the middle nineteenth century, introduced considerable modernizations (Scharf 1888:1086).

Above the Wyoming Mill was Allaband's mill. William Allaband bought 307 acres of the Long Reach tract in 1767 from Hillary Herbert; Wharton's [now Wyoming] pond was then already in existence downstream from it (Scharf 1888:1086).

On December 1, 1785, Richard Mason sold part of Long Reach, north of Isaac's Branch to William Allaband (Scharf 1888:1086). He operated a gristmill, fulling mill, and distillery; his descendants continued the gristmill business, which they sold in 1868 to Henry Todd. After it washed out in 1880, it was not rebuilt.

Not all bids to build mills on Isaac's Branch were successful. In 1761, James Rash, who owned land on the south bank, asked the Court to condemn land on the north bank for the use of a mill.

Freeholders appointed to evaluate the petition recommend against permiting the mill. The committee stated: "And we do further adjudge that notwithstanding the valuation as above that the building and erecting a mill in the place above mentioned will greatly injure the three mills already erected on said branch that it will also be greatly injurious to the Publick and be contrary to the good indended by the Act of Assembly for the incouragement of Building Mills in this Government." (Kent County Mill Petition, 1761)

History of the Project Area

Isaac Webb's plantation, called Shoemaker's Hall, consisted of 400 acres on the north bank of the stream that would thereafter bear his name: Isaac's Branch. A house on the Shoemaker's Hall tract was the last home of Cæsar Rodney, who changed the name of the place to Rodneysburg and planned to develop a townsite (Frank and Hancock 1979:70).

It has been suggested that the first mill at this seat was built in 1685 (Angermeier and Goggin 1984:42). There was a gristmill on the Reserve tract, which adjoins Isaac's Branch here, in 1711. In 1749, John Vining bought the Reserve tract, together with two acres on the north side of Isaac's Branch, condemned for building a mill (Kent County Deed Book O-1, folio 4)

Thomas Dawson sold 500 acres, part of the Brecknock tract, to John Vining in 1753 (Kent County Deed Book O-1, folio 249) In 1759, after the Dawson's death, his part of Shoemaker's Hall was also sold to Vining (Kent County Deed Book P-1, folio 108). John Vining was a native of Salem, New Jersey. He came to Delaware as a lad when his widowed mother married the wealthy Nicholas Ridgely of Delaware. He assembled a massive portfolio of the best Kent County land. He was in an excellent position to accumulate landed wealth through family connections and offices as a trustee of the loan office, speaker of the assembly, colonel of the militia, prothonotary and a member of the county court. In 1764 he became Delaware's second chief justice (Scharf 1888:139, 140, 526).

Vining's mill pond appears on a survey of 1761, in which he claimed a small tract near the head of Shoemaker's Hall and Smyrna tracts (Hopkins survey book, folio 8, Delaware Archives). Vining died in 1770, leaving vast estates to be divested.

A sawmill and gristmill existed here in 1772, when John Pennell bought the seat from Vining's executors. Pennell may have already occupied the site, for he was described in the deed as a miller of Kent County. The property was described as $47\frac{3}{4}$ acres on both sides of Isaac's Branch, parts of Reserve and Shoemaker's Hall (Kent County Deed Book V-1, folio 113).

Pennell added to the holding in 1783, when he bought a tract from John Dickinson. The addition was next to Pennell's home place, adjoining the river, the mill gut, and the land where Cæsar Rodney then dwelt (Kent County Deed Book X-1, folio 13).

After Pennell died, the mill and houses fell to his heirs. His eldest son, Thomas, was entitled to a double share, or $\frac{2}{7}$. He was entitled to $\frac{1}{5}$ of the $\frac{1}{7}$ share of his deceased brother, John, Jr. Thomas' shares were seized by Sheriff Henry Molleston to satisfy a debt to Ann Ridgely.

The sheriff sold the share to Nicholas Ridgely, who immediately conveyed it back to Molleston in his own right (Kent County Deed Book F-2, folios 201-202). Molleston was connected by marriage to the Pennell family, who conveyed the rest of the interest to him in 1799 and 1801. Molleston was elected governor in 1819, but died before he could take office (Kent County Deed Books F-2, folio 202 and G-2, folio 91).

The next operator, Jonathan Elliott, added a wool carding machine to the mill. He rented the mill from Molleston's brother-in-law, Nathaniel Coombe (Scharf 1888:1085). After Molleston's death, Joseph Turner sued his estate in the Court of Common Pleas. The first tract sold by the sheriff was the plantation, mill, mill seat, and "commodious" dwelling. In 1826, former sheriff William Saulsbury made a deed to Turner's stepson, Jonathan Mifflin, who had purchased the site at auction (Kent County Deed Book Z-2,

page 136). Mifflin died, leaving a widow but no children. His heirs were his wife, his mother, and her husband Joseph Turner, who sold the property to William K. Lockwood, Caleb H. Sipple, and Robert O. Penniwell, Dover merchants (Kent County Deed Book C-3, page 202). Lockwood sold his interest to his partners in 1837 (Kent County Deed Book L-3, page 216).

David D. Lewis, who had been the miller, bought the mill seat and 100 acres from Sipple and Penniwell in 1846. The deed also included a six-acre tract on the road from Forest Landing to Camden (Kent County Deed Book U-3, folio 258). Lewis had bought 180 acres in the vicinity from John Manlove in 1836 (Kent County Deed Books C-3, folio 216, I-3, folio 211, and M-3, folio 39).

In 1858 and 1859 Henry Moore of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, bought the mill seat from the Lewis heirs and began immediately to extensively rebuild the mills, using the newest roller technology.

Because David Lewis had left nine children, the title was split. Moore bought one share from Timothy Killen in December 1858 and later perfected his claim (Kent County Deed Book O-4, folio 462). The place has since been known commonly as Moore's Mill, even though he and his son called it Mount Vernon Mills.

Moore must have been confident that he had perfected his title by February 1859, when he applied for fire insurance on the mill and two houses (Kent County Mutual declaration 873). The mill was described as a three-story timber mill house on a brick foundation, measuring 28' by 36'. There was also a two-story frame house, 24' by 28' with a two-story kitchen measuring 16' by 32', all heated by open fireplaces. A third building on the policy was a story-and-a-half frame dwelling, 16' by 16', with a single-story attached building 16' by 18'. On December 31 of the same year, Moore insured $600 worth of repairs and new machinery in the mill house.

The two-story dwelling probably was the one shown on the west side of the road in the 1867 Beers *Atlas* map (FIGURE 2). It may have been the same "commodious" dwelling cited in earlier deeds.

In 1874, Moore insured his new two-story frame dwelling on the east side of the road. This new building had a tin roof, and was heated by stoves (Kent County Mutual declaration 4792). Henry E. Moore, son of the owner, was married in 1876 and succeeded to the mill after his father died in 1886. This may have been the tall "peach" style house recently demolished along the road from Route 113A to the mill (K-6650).The site is now covered by a mini-storage facility

In 1881, Moore insured a two-story frame dwelling house, on the west side of the road. The wood-shingled main dwelling was 16' by 20', with a 16' by 16' kitchen and a shed attached, as well as porches. It was heated by stoves (Kent County Mutual declaration 7141). Additional structures and a piano appear in a new declaration issued in 1883 (Kent County Mutual declaration 8758). This house (K-1013) was occupied during the present century by the younger Henry Moore (PLATE 3).

The 1881 insurance declaration also included additional mill machinery. A new insurance declaration in 1883 described the same size mill building as had existed 24 years earlier. It was powered by a water wheel and heated by a coal stove. Half the roof was shingled, the rest covered with sheet iron (Kent County Mutual declaration 8486).

Since 1823, Isaac's Branch has been the north boundary of Murderkill Hundred, which was later divided to create North Murderkill Hundred (Scharf 1888:1077). Most of the mill system lay in Dover Hundred, now East Dover Hundred (FIGURE 4).

In 1936, the seat was bought by the State of Delaware, which built a fish hatchery and rearing ponds (K-6652) between the mill and the dam, east of Route 113A.

Ownership of the pond and stream were thereby separated from the historic mill farm. The state owns the water, but the mill site is owned by others. A dwelling (K-6651) now stands on the mill foundation, with the tailrace running below.

PROJECT AREA HIGHWAY HISTORY

The original King's Road south from Dover forked at Puncheon Run, just north of the project area. The upper road, now roughly the course of Route 13, went south near the peninsular divide. It was a relatively level road, with only minor stream crossings The lower road, including the project area, crossed streams very close to the head of tidewater. It was the shortest route from Dover to Lewes, but it contained relatively deep fords and long bridges. The original course of the lower road lay near the present alignment of Route 113A from Cooper's Corner to Isaac's Branch. It crossed Tidbury Branch somewhat south of the present bridge, in the current county park.

At that crossing was a planked ford for horses and vehicles and a footbridge for pedestrians.

Remains of the ford reportedly can still be seen in the bed of Tidbury Branch (FIGURE 3).

In 1793, the General Assembly authorized Nathaniel and Jonathan Hunn to dam Tidbury Branch near its mouth to power a mill. Since this dam would flood the highway crossing, they were also obliged to relocate the public road farther upstream. The relocated road, now Old Mill Road (FIGURE 4), was to serve more than a century as the main highway.

When the current, more direct, route was chosen, it followed closely the abandoned Colonial-era road from Isaac's Branch to Five Points, now called Rising Sun (Heite and Heite 1989:18).

The present road was created in 1920, part of the massive highway upgrading spurred by recently-enacted state and federal road-reform laws (Spero 1991: 183) The present Route 113A was then identified as Route K-1 (DelDOT Contract 16, 1920). A widening project in 1957 obliterated surface indications of the the original bridges and pavement, but major structures remain in their original locations (DelDOT Contract 1551, 1957).The young highway department established a maintenance yard in the borrow pit between the new and old roads (K-6654) on a site now occupied by three houses.

On the north bank of Isaac's branch, the old mill was replaced by a residence and an array of chicken houses was built in front of Henry Moore's big house.

A trailer sales lot replaced the chicken farm, and agricultural lands became mobile home parks. For a time, Delaware Technical and Community College operated a temporary campus in the old chicken farm, to be followed at the site by a furniture store.

More recently, a mini-storage facility has replaced the Moore house and another house along the former county road that formerly paralleled the headrace.