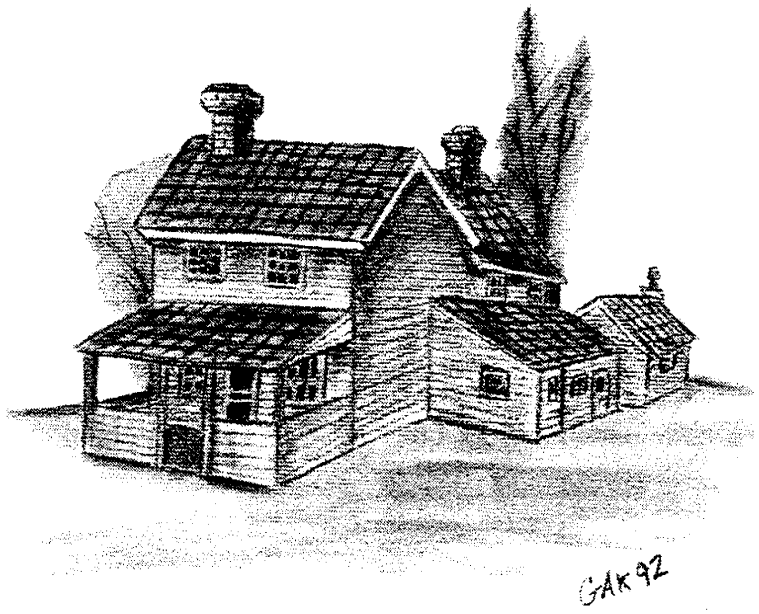


K-1060

Figure 26
Sketch of the Leon Corney House
as it appeared when occupied

10. The Mosley Community

ALONG THE WEST SIDE OF MCKEE ROAD stand two two-story frame houses and a single-story house, built around the turn of the century in varieties of the Delaware vernacular style.

A fifth member of the group, the William Morris Carney house, has been moved to the Delaware Agricultural Museum. The museum's house, described in the following chapter, exhibits characteristics common to the group.

The one-story house, said to have been moved to its site more than fifty years ago, occupies a triangular lot that was among the early community elements. Two other two-story frame houses, the Robert Carney house and the Frazer Carney house, are lost.

The community came into being in 1884 when Jacob Mosley bought a 36-acre tract from Samuel Pleasanton Mifflin. This had been part of Mifflin's mother's share of her father, John Pleasanton's, estate. Subdivision of the Pleasanton farm was a classic example of the role of the probate process in creating subdivisions through successive estate divisions. Recently the same process has led to further fragmentation (FIGURE 30, PAGE 81).

John Pleasanton bought 286 acres of marginal land in 1818 as an investment. When he died, twenty years later, it was split among his heirs (FIGURE 9, PAGE 43).

By the time the daughters had all died, the 286 acres was fragmented into small holdings, mostly too small to be useful. The best ground was Mary DuHamel's portion along the St. Jones River.

When the present McKee Road was opened in 1881, the Mifflin and DuHamel tracts obtained valuable road frontage. In 1882, Mary Du Hamel's son-in-law, William Denney, bought the farm from her estate. Jacob Mosley bought Samuel Pleasanton Mifflin's 36-acre tract of unimproved land in 1884. Denney and Mosley adjusted their boundary to conform to the road alignment later that year (FIGURE 10, PAGE 44).

Within the next few years, Mosley sold off parts of the tract to other members of the moor community. In short order a row of small two-story farmhouses stood along the road. Other Pleasanton heirs sold additional tracts, and so did the neighbor to the north.

The community remained stable for nearly three-quarters of a century. The houses were occupied by two or more generations, and the small farms provided subsistence or supplemental food and income to wage-earning residents.

With the passing of the second generation, the properties again fell into the hands of younger family members who were absentee owners. These heirs sold off their portions as building lots, creating the present infill of modern houses and mobile homes that now line the road. Eventually the older houses were abandoned as McKee Road became a suburban street consumed by the Dover sprawl.

Newer houses, owned by people who are not members of the moor group, were built farther back from the road. The rural character of the community faded as it merged into the suburban strip.

LEVI MOSLEY PROPERTY

Immediately north of the Pleasanton property was another former Loockerman estate fragment, 213 acres belonging to Lewis Geiser. When he bought his farm in 1880, Geiser also was the first resident owner on his piece of the Loockerman estate.

Between 1896 and 1903, Levi Mosley bought three parcels, totalling twelve acres, from Geiser, adjoining the land Jacob Mosley had bought from the Pleasanton heirs. The two-story house on that parcel (K-6689) is larger than most of the neighbors', and has been altered. An unusual facade, with a hip-roofed wing in the front, sets this apart from the local folk genre.

Plate 20
The Levi Mosley house, built circa 1896

Elizabeth, widow of Levi Mosley, sold the property in 1915 to Watson Cramer, who sold it in 1922 to William H. Morgan. The Morgans sold it in 1941 to Wilbert Sherman of Port Penn, who conveyed it in 1944 to Charles and Ethel Showell of Pennsylvania, who sold off pieces in 1959 and 1962. The surrounding houses and a mobile home now occupy the tract and the farmland remains fallow.

The part of Geiser's farm west of McKee Road is a subdivision called The Meadows. The eastern part is occupied by General Metalcraft, a circa 1939 bungalow, and a warehouse; the fields lie fallow.

Plate 21
House on the Johnson lot

MARTHA JOHNSON LOT

Next to Levi Mosley's tract is a triangular half acre Jacob Mosley sold to Martha Johnson, wife of Burton Johnson, in 1885. She was a widow in 1906 when she sold it to Walter H. Carney. He held it until 1937, when he sold it to Frank Hall Pritchett, who conveyed it to Paul Smith in 1955.

The property has a history of lifetime owner-occupancy unrivalled in the neighborhood. The present one-story frame house (K-1059) is a former school, moved to the site from across the road more than fifty years ago after the earlier house burned. The house has undergone considerable renovation. It stands on one of the oldest lots on the road, even though the house betrays little evidence of age.

LEON CORNEY HOUSE

The two-bay, two-story Leon Corney house (K-1060) is one of two surviving similar houses built by the first generation settlers along the road. Leon Corney, or Carney (1898-1973) bought 13 acres from the First National Bank of Dover in 1939. The property had been conveyed in 1938 to the bank by Clody and Estella Pritchett.

The Pritchetts had obtained the tract from David and Lucinda Mosley in 1910. At that time it was 16 acres, the residue of the original Jacob Mosley farm. This may, therefore, be the Jacob Mosley house; David and Lucinda Mosley lived in an adjacent house, destroyed in 1993 (K-6690).

Plate 22
Leon Corney house, facade

Plate 23
Leon Corney house, rear

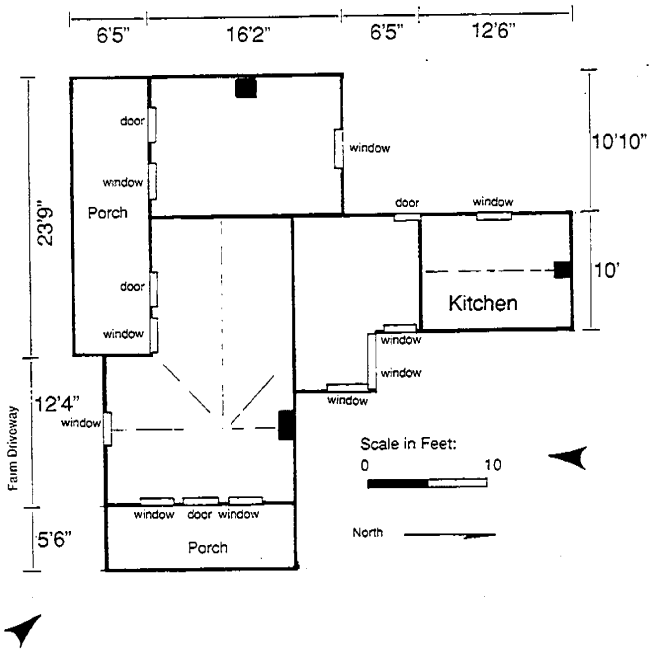
Plate 24
Leon Corney house, detail of kitchen chimney end

While the chimneys of the main house are brick, consistent with the original period of construction, the kitchen features a cement-block chimney with a cast-concrete top.

MOSLEY-BRATCHER HOUSE

In 1888, Jacob Mosley conveyed three acres to Lucinda Mosley, wife of David. On this three-acre tract until 1993 was a house (K-6690) that probably was built soon thereafter. David and Lucinda added to their holdings. In 1900 they bought 19 acres of the Pleasanton estate from Florence Creadick, a widow whose husband had bought it for investment.

Figure 27
Ground plans of the two Mosley houses
The Mosley-Bratcher house, K-1060, above, and the Leon Corney house, K-6690, below, with photo locations of the plates indicated by arrows



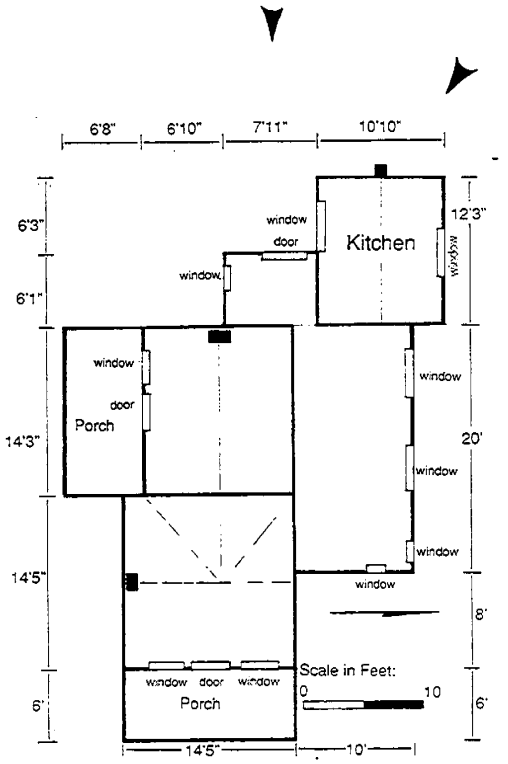


Plate 25

Mosley-Bratcher house, from the southeast

David, Jacob's son, eventually controlled about 40 acres west of the road. Between 1911 and 1915, he also owned part of the Geiser farm east of the road.

In 1919 David and Lucinda conveyed the remainder of the home farm to Herbert Harmon of Philadelphia. The Harmons added to the holding by purchasing yet another Pleasanton estate tract, the 18-acre Susan Hamm portion to the west. The Harmons held the property forty years, until 1950, when they sold it to Albert and Emma Bratcher, who resided there for many years.

Plate 26

Mosley-Bratcher house, from the north

These two Mosley houses represented an extremely conservative style of construction, with external kitchens that had become unfashionable among whites in Kent County by the late nineteenth century. Porches, now enclosed, connected the houses to the kitchens and provided outdoor covered work areas.

The next two houses in the group are missing. A row of modern houses now occupy the five-acre lot that Jacob Mosley sold to Robert Carney in 1884, part of the original subdivision. Within living memory this lot contained an old house (PLATE 1), and the yard trees still mark its site.

South of the Robert Carney lot was the lot Isaac Mosley conveyed to Sallie (Mrs. William) Carney in 1885, part of the ten acres he had bought from Jacob Mosley the year before. Her house (K-6691) is now at the Delaware Agricultural Museum and is subject of the next chapter.

Plate 27

Frazier Carney house facade

FRAZIER CARNEY TOFT

Sallie's son, Frazier Carney (1883-1946), built the house that stood until November 1992 on Isaac's five acres next to the south edge of the original tract (K-6692). When he died, the farm contained 22 acres.

This house was larger and more elegant than the others, but it had a separate kitchen, like the other houses in the group. It was the only one of the group that still had its farm buildings. The plan was L-shaped with a broad verandah on two sides.

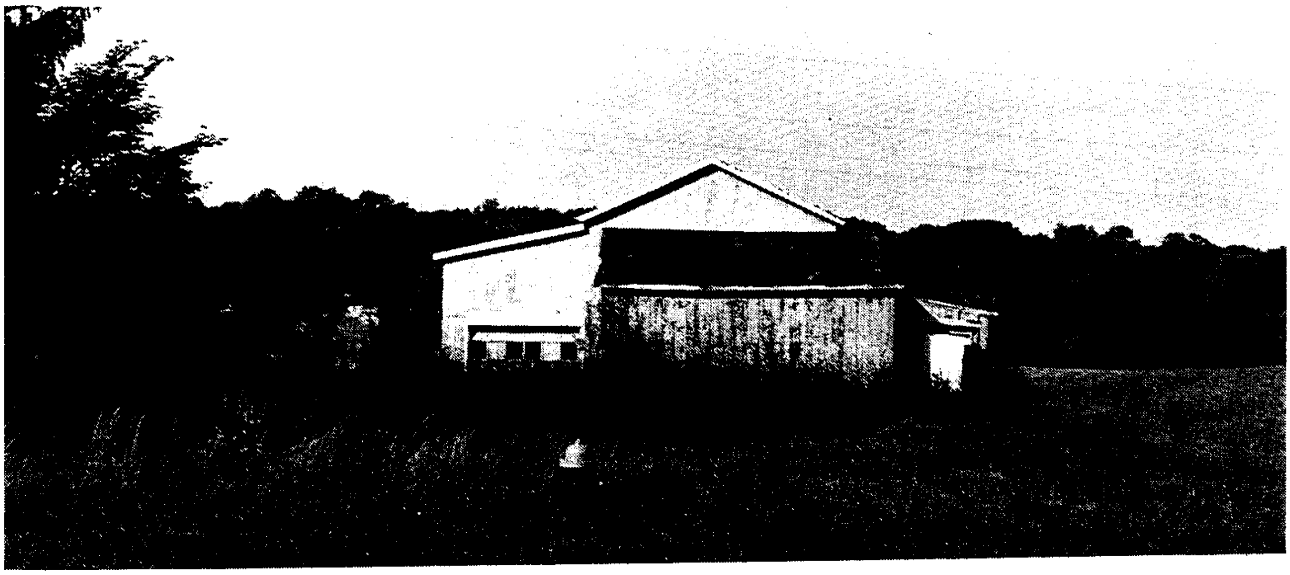


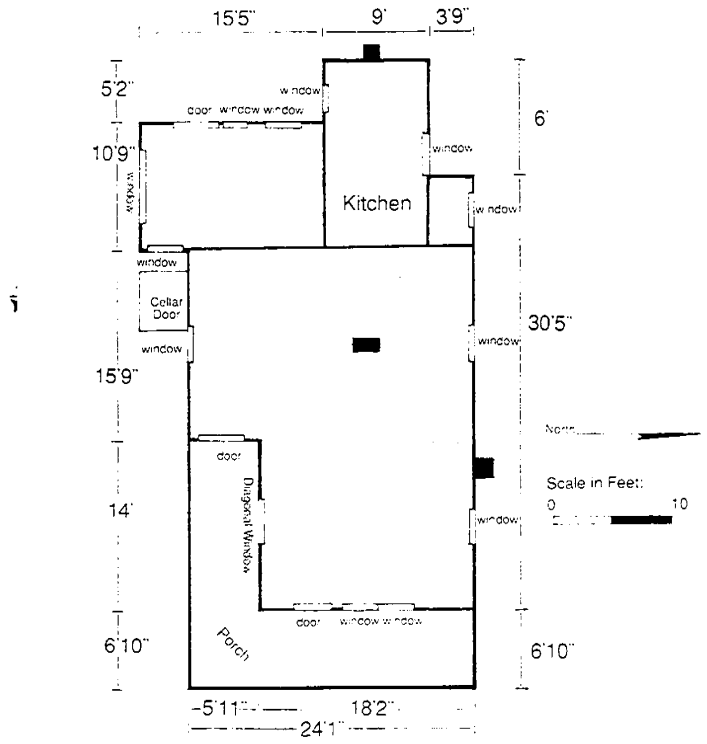
Plate 28

Frazier Carney barn, corn crib and privy

Figure 28

Ground plan of the Frazier Carney House

K-1692, with photo locations of the plates indicated by arrows



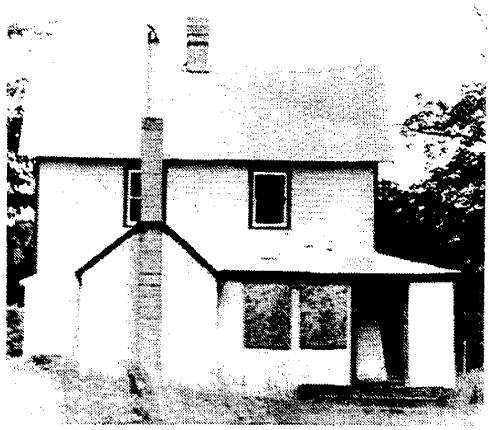


Plate 29

Frazier Carney house, rear

Only this property, of all the community, retained its agricultural outbuildings (PLATE 28) until it was burned. Even though all but two of the houses are derelict and the original families have moved away, the Jacob Mosley tract is not uninhabited.

Instead, the community's territory is occupied by a new generation of modern houses and two church buildings. While original families still own some parcels, most occupants are a new population. The process of succession and subdivision that began with the Loockerman heirs in the eighteenth century has continued through another phase.

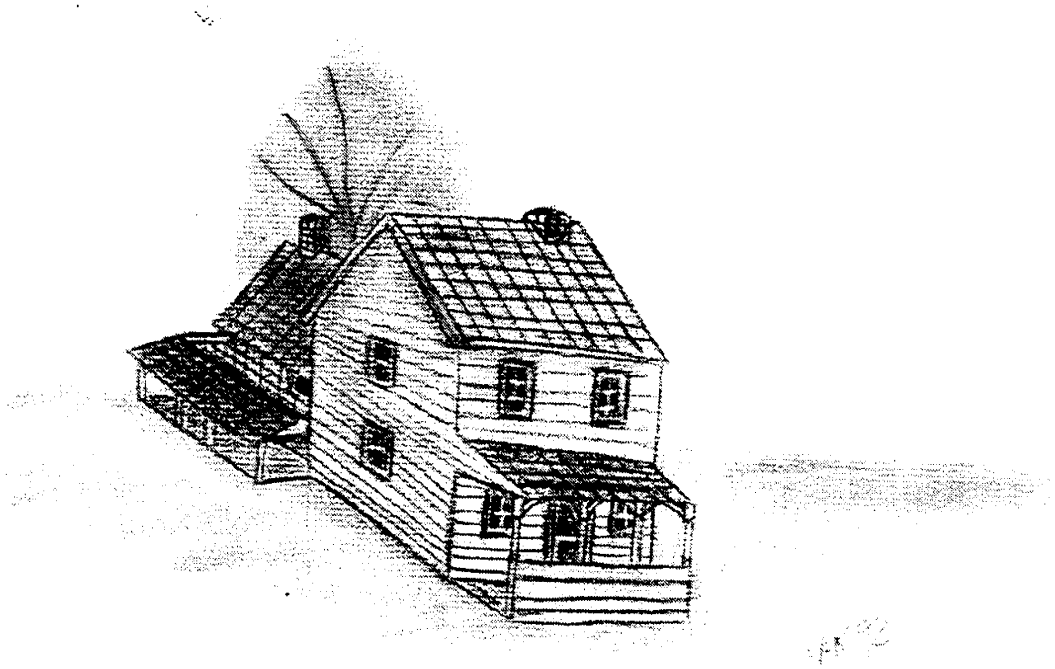


Figure 29

Sketch of a "typical" house of the group

based on the Mosley-Bratcher house

K-6690

THE JACOB MOSLEY COMMUNITY

NAME OF PROPERTY	STATE SITE NUMBER	DESCRIPTION AND TAX MAP PARCEL	INTEGRITY	CLASSIFICATION
Levi Mosley House	K-6689	2-story frame house ED 05 67.00 01 09	Good	building
House currently on Martha Johnson Lot	K-1059	1-story old school, said to have been moved more than 50 years ago ED 05 67.00 01 13	Good	Site and possibly building
Leon Corney House	K-1060	2-story frame house site ED 05 67.00 01 16	Good	Building
Site of Mosley-Bratcher House	K-6690	2-story frame house ED 05 67.00 01 21	House destroyed	Site
Mosley-Bratcher fields		Agricultural fields ED 05 67.00 01 24, 24.01, 28	Good	Site
Site of the Robert Carney House		Site of a house known from documents and oral history ED 05 67.00 01 26	Unknown	Site
Site of the William Morris Carney House	7K-C-408	Site of a house moved to the Delaware Agricultural Museum grounds ED 05 67.00 01 27.01	Good	Site
William Morris Carney House	K-6691	House now at the museum	Excellent	Building
William Morris Carney fields		Agricultural fields ED 05 67.00 01 27.01	Good	Site
Frazier Carney House Site and Toft Elements	K-6692	2-story frame house and barn, corn crib, outhouse ED 05 67.00 01 29	House destroyed	Buildings and Site

ARCHITECTURAL INTERPRETATION

One is immedately struck by the fact that the recent infill houses stand back from the road, even though many of them were built before the county dictated setback requirements. Builders of the infill were African-Americans who sought a suburban setting during a period when housing segregation still existed in Kent County. Their houses are neat and stylish, with broad suburban front yards.

The older generation's houses were built near the road, a pattern that architectural historians have attributed to tenant houses. Because these houses were all built to be owner-occupied, their position relative to the road cannot be explained as expressing a "tenant house" pattern. Instead, this location may speak to self-perception or defined status. Perhaps it is significant that the newest, most fashionable, and largest of the moor houses, the Levi Mosley and Frazier Carney houses, are set farther back from the road, on distinct knolls.

Floor plans of older houses were also the most conservative, consisting of single-cell blocks surrounded by working porches and exterior kitchens on the rear, the minimum possible structure to express the traditional Delaware two-story farmhouse form. All the properties, except the Johnson

property, were intended to be farms, at least large enough to provide subsistence for the owners. As parcels came available, the neighbors bought additional land, which was farmed, even though some of it needed draining before it could become useable.

The Delaware vernacular farmhouse form can be interpreted as an expression of the Georgian mind-set and the trend toward increased privacy. Respectability and social position is expressed by the existence of a formal parlor and a front porch toward the road, from which the family was shielded, to create physical and social distance between the occupants and the public.

AGRICULTURAL INTERPRETATION

Most of the ± 95 acres once owned by community members was farmed. Deed references to ditches that still exist indicate that the boggy land was reclaimed. Although a small part of the farmland has been covered by new houses and some has gone back to trees, field boundary lines still can be traced. It should, therefore, be possible to recover considerable evidence about the farming practices of these people from the fields they cultivated.

Clearing and draining the swamps must have been labor-intensive, but expenditure of such effort does not necessarily indicate a high level of agricultural sophistication.

Analysis of evidence for agricultural practices should provide information on the nineteenth-century moors' educational level and sophistication, which has not been possible from the documentary sources.

For instance, evidence of manuring would suggest knowledge of scientific agricultural practices like those adopted by gentlemen farmers during the nineteenth century, would indicate a higher degree of education and/or sophistication than might be expected of people at the lower end of the social and economic scale.

Since the former agricultural fields have not yet been developed for subdivisions, they offer a rare opportunity for archæological examination of this subject. Dover's suburban sprawl is growing north through the moor home territory, consuming the farmland that might provide these answers. This tract may, in fact, soon be unique.

ETHNIC INTERPRETATION

Any study of Native American remnant groups must inquire into evidence for cultural survivals. After more than three centuries of acculturation, such evidence may be scant indeed. In the presence of such sparse remains, there is always the temptation to infer cultural significance where none exists.

One must therefore be particularly cautious in ascribing traits to the Native American heritage of the people without exhaustive verification.

It can, however, be stated that these houses were built under the control of this minority group. In this sense, these houses belong to that rare category of site where we can assign ethnic origins to both the builder and the occupants. Such features as the external kitchens may, therefore, be truly ethnic traits

The data provided by this small survey is inadequate to make generalizations. The Native American descendant group in question has not been separately studied to the point where culture traits are identifiable. Indeed, there may not be any overt material indicia of moor ethnicity.

Because statewide cultural resource survey data is not keyed to ethnic affiliations of builders, it is impossible to state on the basis of available data that there is a "moor" style of house, or that the tofts of these people should betray any features absent from the homes of others. The issue of ethnic affiliation of the built environment has been gingerly avoided by some researchers and glossed over by others, with the result that there is no solid basis upon which to distinguish clusters such as this.