

2. BACKGROUND AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

The following is a brief synopsis of the regional prehistory and history. For a detailed discussion of the cultural periods mentioned the reader is advised to read Custer's 1989 text entitled *Prehistoric Cultures of the Delmarva Peninsula: An Archaeological Study* and Dent's 1995 text entitled *Chesapeake Prehistory: Old Traditions, New Directions*. Both of these references will provide a more comprehensive discussion of the prehistoric archaeological context than is permitted in a technical report. In reference to the prehistory of the Delmarva region and the macro-Chesapeake Bay, the prehistory is broken-up into three major periods: the Paleo-Indian Period (circa 11,500 – 10,000 radiocarbon years B.P.), the Archaic Period (circa 10,000 – 3,000 radiocarbon years B.P.), and the Woodland Period (circa 3,000 – 400 radiocarbon years B.P.). Each one of these periods is marked by changes in human subsistence, technology, and social organization. With respect to the historic era, a more detailed syntheses of the Elsmere area are presented in this summary.

Paleo-Indian Period (11,500 – 10,000 ¹⁴C yr BP)

The earliest unequivocal evidence of human occupation in the 'New World' is associated with the Paleo-Indian period. The first pan-regional diagnostic cultural remains in North America are associated with the Clovis culture (Bonnichsen and Turnmire 1999). Clovis sites have been dated to roughly 11,500 to 10,800 radiocarbon years old at sites in the western United States (Haynes et al. 1984: 184-191). Recent radiometric dates at Clovis sites in the eastern United States (McAvoy and McAvoy 1997, and Dent 2000) suggest that the eastern sites are contemporaneous with their western counterparts. Additional evidence for pre-Clovis cultures in the Middle Atlantic region was reported at Meadowcroft Rockshelter in Pennsylvania (Adovasio et al. 1978), at Cactus Hill in Virginia (McAvoy and McAvoy 1997), and at Miles Point in Maryland (Lowery et al. 2010). The few pre-Clovis sites suggest that earlier cultures were in the Middle Atlantic region between 21,000 and 13,000 ¹⁴C yr BP.

With respect to subsistence, only one site in the Middle Atlantic region has provided data relative to the diet of peoples during the Paleo-Indian period. The Shawnee-Minisink site along the Delaware River suggests that Paleo-Indian peoples were utilizing fish, seeds, nuts, fruits and berries (Dent 2000). Recent work in the Mid-West, Northeast, and Southeast is beginning to indicate that eastern Paleo-Indians may have hunted or scavenged large extinct game animals. The Kimmswick site in eastern Missouri has produced Clovis projectile points in association with several mastodons and a giant sloth (Graham and Mead, 1989). In the Northeast, the Hiscock site in western New York has produced three fluted Clovis style projectile points in association with mastodon remains and the remains of other mammals (Gramly and Funk 1990: 16). Gramly and Funk (ibid.) suggest that the mastodon carcasses found at the Hiscock site may have been scavenged and not actually hunted by Paleo-Indians. Several tantalizing Paleoindian sites in Florida have produced Clovis style fluted points in contexts with Late Pleistocene faunal remains (Dunbar 1991: 198-211). Recently, Tankersley and Redmond (2000: 42-46) have reported Clovis stone and bone tools in association with several flat-headed peccaries and giant beaver from Sheridan Cave in Ohio. The recent archaeological evidence from the East suggests Paleo-Indian subsistence may have been partially based on Pleistocene megafauna (Gramly and Funk 1990: 16).

The diagnostic stone technology associated with the Clovis sites in the Middle Atlantic region and North America primarily is associated with a variety of 'fluted' lanceolate projectile points (i.e., Clovis, Cumberland/Barnes, Mid-Paleo, Crowfield, and Hardaway-Dalton). A variety of these point types have been recorded in regional artifact collections (Lowery 1999). Carr and Bergman (2000) provided a brief summary of the Paleo-Indian stone tool technology aside from the diagnostic projectile points. Carr and Bergman (Ibid.) suggest that in the Middle Atlantic region bifacial cores dominate eastern Clovis assemblages, along with polyhedral, tabular and cobble/pebble cores. These authors (Ibid.) have suggested that 'true' Paleolithic blade cores are lacking in eastern Clovis assemblages. Stanford (personal communication: 4/19/01) suggested that 'true' blade cores are included in the assemblage from the Shawnee-Minisink site but were misinterpreted in the earlier publications about the site. Lowery and Phillips (1994) and Lowery (2000) provided data that indicates 'true' blades were manufactured from large cobbles of high-quality lithic materials. Here within the Chesapeake Bay region Paleo-Indians utilized locally available cobbles of cryptocrystalline and non-cryptocrystalline materials (Ibid.).

With respect to the social organization of the Paleo-Indian cultures, researchers (Custer 1989 and Dent 1995) have suggested that in the Middle Atlantic region Paleo-Indian groups were extremely mobile hunter-gatherers. As such, the seasonal migrations encompassed large territories (Ibid.). Lowery's (2000) work on the Delmarva Peninsula suggests that regional Clovis groups utilized locally available secondary cobble sources and locally available primary Aquia formation orthoquartzites to manufacture their tool kits. Lowery (ibid.) would suggest that Clovis groups within the coastal plain were not traveling long distances to acquire bedrock materials for their tool kits. Joseph McAvoy's work (personal communication: 3/27/00) in Virginia implies the same pattern. Like southern Virginia, the Delmarva region also contains one of the largest accumulations of diagnostic Paleo-Indian projectile points known for the Middle Atlantic area (Lowery 2000). In other words, McAvoy (personal communication: 3/27/00) and Lowery (Ibid.) suggest that Clovis groups were local, had entrenched settlement patterns, and had restricted mobility patterns. The high density of Paleoindian diagnostic projectile points on the Delmarva Peninsula (see Lowery 1999 and 2000) and in southern Virginia (McAvoy 1992) clearly reinforces this observation. Lowery (2000) and McAvoy's (personal communication: 3/27/00) observations about Clovis age settlement and mobility patterns would have definite ramifications relative to the arguments related to pre-Clovis occupations within the Middle Atlantic region.

Archaic Period (10,000 – 3,000 ¹⁴C yr BP)

The Archaic period in the Middle Atlantic region encompasses a time frame between 10,000 and 3,000 radiocarbon years B.P. The period has been further separated into early, middle, and late designations. Diagnostic projectile points in the region associated with the Early Archaic period include Palmer, Charleston, Amos, Lost Lake, Decatur, Fort Nottoway/Thebes, and Kirk variety points (see Lowery 1999: 47-51, and Figure 10 I-Q). The diagnostic projectile points in the region associated with the Middle Archaic period include MacCorkle, St. Albans, LeCroy, Stanly, Guilford, and Morrow Mountain points (see Lowery 1999: 51-53, and Figure 12 A-G). Finally, the diagnostic projectile points in the region associated with the Late Archaic period include Savannah River, Poplar Island, Piney Island, Bare Island, Pequea, Lehigh / Koens-Crispin Broadspears, Normanskill, Susquehanna Broadspear, Perkiomen Broadspear, and Fishtail variety points (see Lowery 1999: 53-55, and Figure 12 H-P).

With respect to subsistence, various sites in the Middle Atlantic region have provided data relative to the diet of peoples during the Archaic period. The Early Archaic levels at the Crane Point site in Maryland produced a hearth feature with charred hickory nut, butternut, possible acorns, and wild seeds including amaranth and chenopod (Lowery and Custer 1990: 99). The Early Archaic levels at the Cactus Hill site in Virginia have also revealed hearths with oak and hickory remains (McAvoy and McAvoy 1997: Appendix D). The Early Archaic hearths at Cactus Hill site have been dated between 9,790 +/- 200 radiocarbon years B.P. to 8,800 +/- 120 radiocarbon years B.P. (Ibid). The Middle Archaic levels at the Slade site in Virginia included a hearth containing carbonized hickory hulls dated to 8,300 +/- 110 radiocarbon years B.P. (Egloff and McAvoy 1990: 70). The Late Archaic subsistence data for the region is more extensive and it suggests that nuts, fruits, roots, seeds, deer, black bear, squirrel, rabbit, turtles, fish, waterfowl, beaver, otter, and muskrat were exploited by humans (Stevens 1991: 202-203). Sites in the region also suggest that during the Late Archaic period regional cultures around the Chesapeake Bay began to exploit marine resources such as fish, clams, and oysters (Custer 1988: 121-136).

The technologies linked to the Archaic period in the Middle Atlantic region indicate a variety of projectile point types were being manufactured. In the region bifacial technologies, bi-polar technologies, and cobble core reduction is indicated (see Geier 1990: 81-98, and McLearn 1991: 89-138). Ground stone tools such as axes, adzes, gouges, and spearthrower weights are associated with Archaic period sites. During the Late Archaic period steatite stone bowls appear in the archaeological record. Custer (1989) and Dent (1995) indicate that Archaic peoples cached artifacts and there is evidence for extensive trade and exchange.

With respect to the social organization of the Archaic cultures, researchers (Custer 1989 and Dent 1995) have suggested that in the Middle Atlantic region Archaic groups were mobile hunter-gatherers. Even so, the mobility over the duration of the Archaic period seems to go down during the latter portion of the Archaic period (Ibid.). Intentional burials and cemeteries appear during the Archaic period. Stanzeski (1998: 42-43) has reported a series of Early Archaic age cremation burials at the West Creek site in southern coastal New Jersey. A date of 9850 +/- 160 radiocarbon years B.P. was recorded for the cremation burials at the West Creek site and the burials included Kirk corner-notched points along with a few scrapers (Ibid.). Egloff and McAvoy 1990: 70) reported a poorly preserved Middle Archaic cremation burial at the Slade site in Virginia. The cremation burial at the Slade site was found in association with MacCorkle-like or St. Albans points and a ground stone adz (Ibid.). A hearth from the same level was dated to roughly 8,350 radiocarbon years B.P. Late Archaic age burials in association with spearthrower weights and bifacial points were reported by Regensburg (1970: 20-23) at the Savich Farm site in New Jersey. The Archaic age archaeological data suggest that regional cultures may have had defined territories with designated cemetery locations.

Woodland Period (3,000 – 400 ¹⁴C yr BP)

The Woodland period in the Middle Atlantic region encompasses a time frame between 3,000 and 400 radiocarbon years B.P. The period has been further separated into early, middle, and late designations. Diagnostic projectile points in the region associated with the Early Woodland period include Rossville, Teardrop, Piscataway, Meadowood, Hellgramite, and Early Adena variety points (see

Lowery 1999: 55-56, and Figure 12 Q and 13 A-B). The diagnostic projectile points in the region associated with the Middle Woodland period include Late Adena, Fox Creek/Selby Bay, and Jacks Reef variety points (see Lowery 1999: 56-57, and Figure 13 C-L). Finally, the diagnostic projectile points in the region associated with the Late Woodland period include triangular variety points (see Lowery 1999: 57, and Figure 13 M-O).

The Woodland period subsistence data for the region is more extensive and it suggests that nuts, fruit, roots, seeds, deer, black bear, squirrel, rabbit, turtles, fish, waterfowl, beaver, otter, and muskrat were exploited by humans (Stevens 1991: 202-203, and Barfield and Barber 1992: 225-248). Sites in the region also suggest that during the Woodland period regional cultures around the Chesapeake Bay intensify the exploitation of marine resources such as fish, clams, and oysters (Custer 1988: 121-136). At present, there is no evidence for cultigen utilization along Maryland's Eastern Shore during the Woodland period.

The Woodland period is marked primarily by the introduction and use ceramics. The lithic technology associated with the Woodland period reflects a variety of lithic reduction strategies. Bi-polar and bifacial core reduction is present in the stone tool kit. Decorative items such as stone pendants, gorgets, engraved stone pipes, beads, and a variety of shell and bone artifacts are present in the archaeological record. Copper artifacts also appear in the archaeological record. Long distance trade and exchange is represented in some of the Woodland period assemblages.

Along the Maryland's Eastern Shore, the archaeological data suggests that Woodland period groups practiced a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. High status burials are Early and Middle Woodland burials occur at selected locations on the Delmarva Peninsula (Custer 1989 and Dent 1995). During the Late Woodland period, large mass graves or ossuaries have been discovered (Curry 1999). Even though the groups in the region practiced a hunter-gatherer way of life, the settlement patterns and movements of the regional groups seems to be more restricted.

Settlement and Cultivation (A.D. 1680 – A.D. 1800)

The historical development of southern Christiana Hundred, the general region encompassing the project area, was the focus of Swedish and later Anglo-American settlement and occupation during the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century (Scharf 1888: 880). As early as the 1680s land along Little Mill Creek was acquired by John Richardson, in whose family large portions of land bordering the creek descended through the next two centuries. In the 1720s, John Richardson acquired a mill seat that had been established during the last quarter of the seventeenth century by the earlier Swedish settlers (Ibid). The Richardson's lands and milling enterprises were substantial and productive, enabling John Richardson's son, Richard Richardson, to finance a finely built two-story stone house on the Newport Pike during the late colonial period. His wife, Sarah Tatnall, was the daughter of Edward Tatnall, a prosperous mill and landowner on the Brandywine River (Ibid). By the late eighteenth century mature agrarian village communities supported by scores of farmsteads and estates were located throughout Christiana Hundred and the neighboring jurisdictions, ringing the port city of Wilmington.

Nineteenth-Century Development and Industrialization (A.D. 1800 to A.D. 1900)

The Richardson family maintained significant acreages in southern Christiania Hundred during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as evidenced by the numerous locations of family seats by the time Pomeroy & Beers printed their atlas of Delaware in 1868 (see Figure 2.1). By the mid nineteenth century the land throughout northern Delaware had been divided and subdivided into smaller farm acreages surrounding the expanding city of Wilmington. Instrumental to the commercial and industrial growth and success of Wilmington as a regional distribution and manufacturing centers, was the construction of internal improvements that connected Wilmington to the East Coast population centers in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York, and expedited the movement of foodstuffs and manufacturers across the region and beyond. Productive farms, producing profitable cash crops in wheat and corn, had ready access to regional transportation arteries as they were expanded during the nineteenth century.

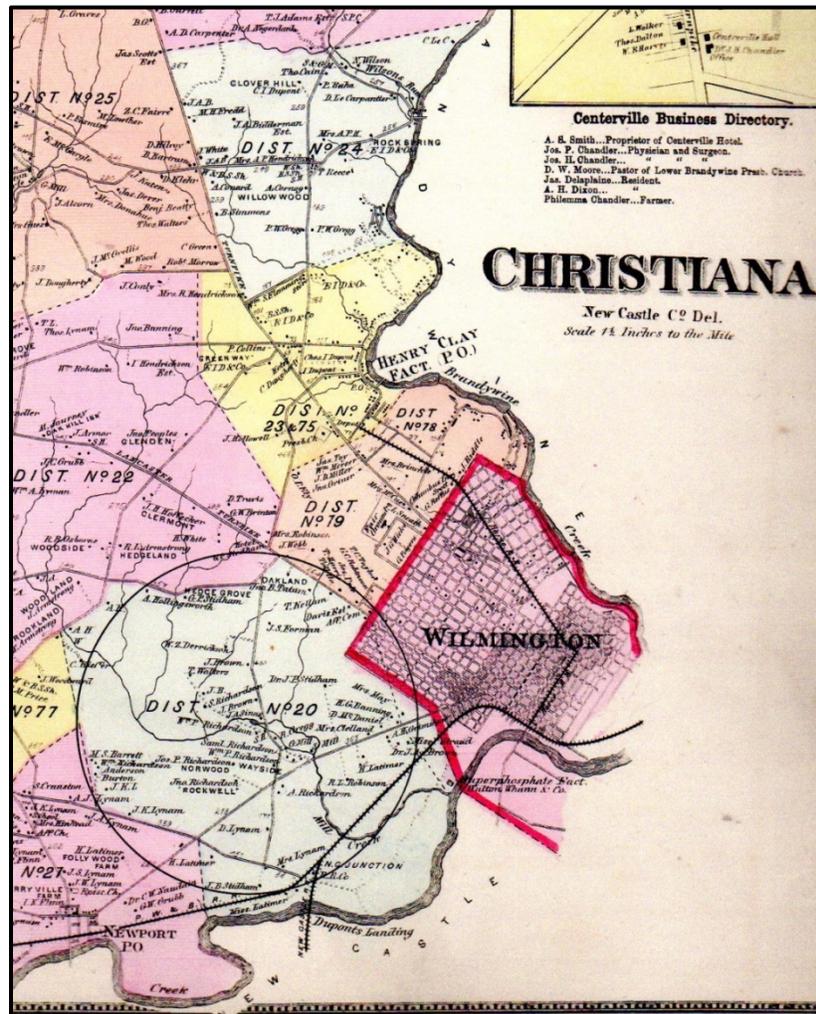


Figure 2.1. The image shows a section of the Pomeroy & Beers (1868) Atlas of Christiania Hundred. The properties held by the Richardson family, and the future site of the community of Elsmere are located in the encircled area. Mill Creek and its tributaries are clearly labeled, and grist and saw mills were in operation in the mid-19th century.

The earliest transportation artery for Christiana Hundred was the Christiana River, which provides direct access to the Delaware River and Bay. During the late eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century, turnpikes and later railroads were laid across the region's landscape. Lancaster Pike was established between Wilmington and Lancaster County during the late eighteenth century, and the Newport Pike—connecting Wilmington and Newport—was established during the early nineteenth century. By the 1830s, the early efforts at building railroads across Christiana Hundred began with the construction of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore railroad by 1836-37. As depicted on the Pomeroy and Bears atlas of 1868, the P. W. & B. crossed the southern portion of Christiana Hundred connecting Wilmington with Newport (see Figure 2.2). Mill Creek, which flowed through Richardson family land holdings, was traversed by the P.,W. & B.

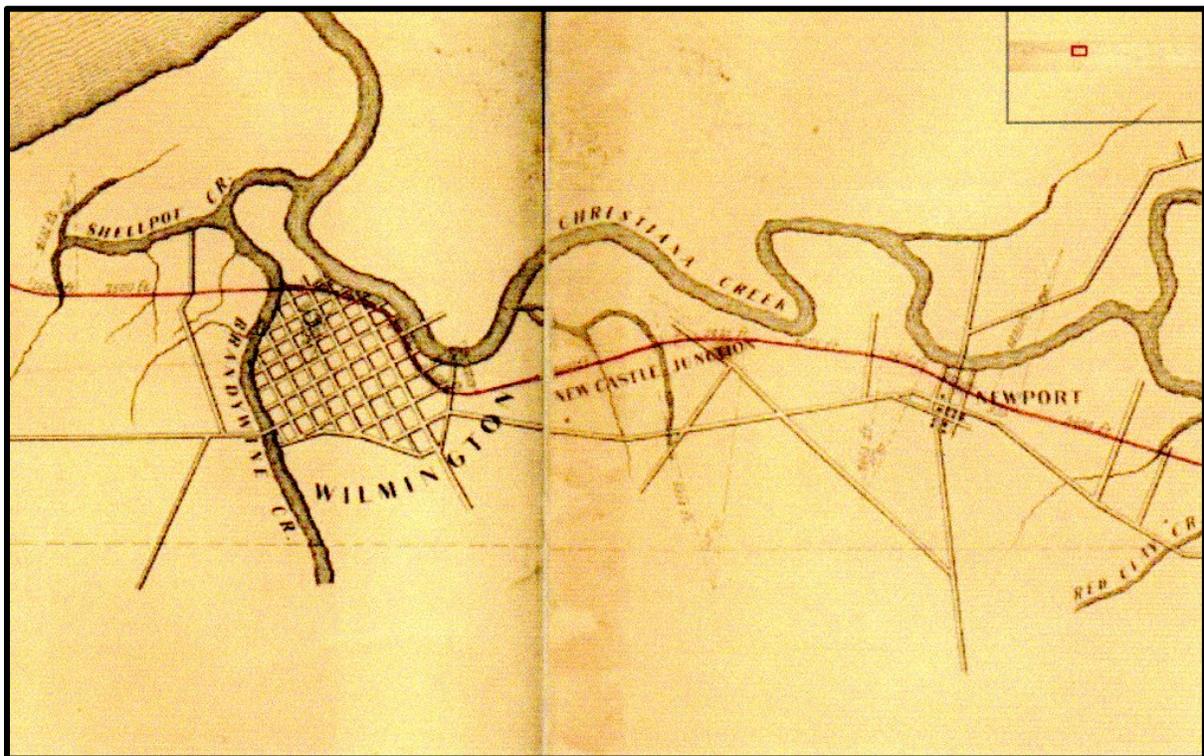


Figure 2.2. The map shows the Plan and profile of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, & Baltimore Railroad, section between Wilmington and Newport (1860). The map is one of the earliest graphic depicts of this early rail line that connected these major East Coast cities and served as a trunk line for later railroad developments during the late nineteenth century.

The third and fourth quarters of the nineteenth century was a period of extensive railroad building activity that turned Wilmington, Baltimore and Philadelphia into much large urban centers of commercial and industrial production. All three cities boomed in population with city limits exceeding their earlier boundaries. On the northwest side of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, no longer able to access the old Wilmington, Baltimore and Philadelphia corridor after its acquisition by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1884, built a parallel line a few miles north. Known initially as the Baltimore & Philadelphia Railroad, it connected the two cities with Wilmington in between. The railroad was finished in 1886. Another line, the Wilmington and Northern Railroad, initially built in 1868, was constructed northward to access some

of the coalfields of eastern and central Pennsylvania. The Wilmington & Northern Railroad was sold to the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad in 1898. A junction of the Wilmington & Northern and Baltimore & Ohio occurred at a town that has recently been platted called Elsmere. The 1893 Baist Atlas of Delaware clearly depicts the new town with only a handful of developed lots, and to the immediate east is the railroad junction (see Figure 2.3). The intersection of two major rail lines encouraged commercial, industrial and residential developments.

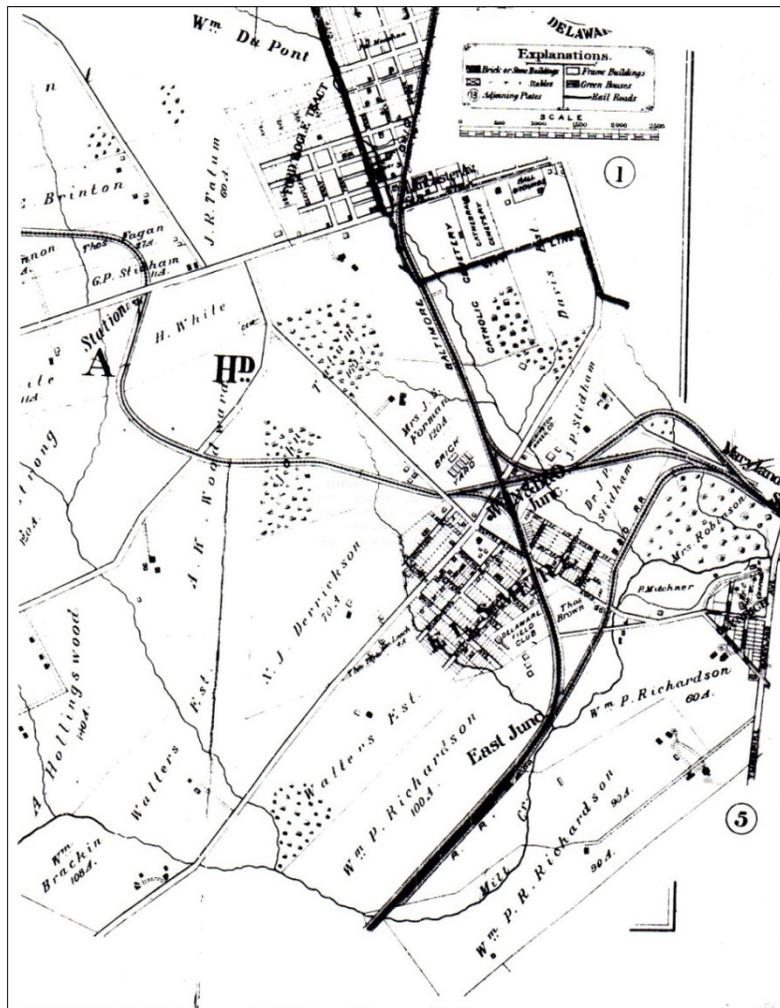


Figure 2.3. A portion of the Baist Atlas of Delaware (1893) illustrating the Town Elsmere and vicinity.

The Baist Atlas not only locates several commercial firms including the Wilmington Wheel Company and a brick-making firm near the railroad junction, but it also records the landowners surrounding the platted town. Clearly indicated are several tracts held by William P. Richardson as well as acreage held in the Walter's estate. The Walter's estate lands had been acquired forty years before the map was printed; a transaction between Richard Richardson, of Philadelphia, and Joseph and John R. Tatnall, conveyed 105 acres of the Richardson family lands to Wilmingtonian Thomas Walter in March 1854 (Delaware Land Records, 1854). By 1893, a new road had been cut through the Walter's land

connecting the recently laid out Elsmere with nearby “Price’s Shops,” later “Price’s Corner.” Real estate promotions highlighting Elsmere as an attractive place to relocate started to appear in local papers with enticements about small town life and escape from the noise and congestion of the city. Real estate promoter, Joshua Herald, was responsible for some of the literature that appeared in the local newspapers. At the end of the century, in 1897, light rail transportation was introduced for residents wanting to live in a small town and commute into the city.

Twentieth-Century Developments (A.D. 1900 to A.D. 2013)

The transportation networks laid down in the last quarter of the nineteenth century proved to be an impetus to sponsor significant growth in the satellite communities around Wilmington during the early to mid-twentieth century. During the period between 1900 and 1920 the resident population in Elsmere expanded from a few hundred to 620 residents. In 1909 the town of Elsmere was incorporated. Expanding the town of Elsmere were developments on the north and south sides of the “New Road.”

To the south of New Road were subdivisions known as Forest Park (see Figure 2.4) and Oak Grove (see Figure 2.5), which were laid out on the lands formerly held by the Walter and Richardson families. In several transactions between Mary Walter Cooper, formerly Mary R. Walter (widow of Charles W. Cooper) acreage was conveyed to the Equitable Guarantee & Trust Company and subsequently transferred to the Oak Grove Company (Delaware Land Records, 1913 and 1915). A transfer in 1913 referenced the road, “recently laid out and opened from Prices’s Shops to Wilmington.” The large acreage also included a boundary along Mill Creek, and mention of a dam bank on the same waterway.

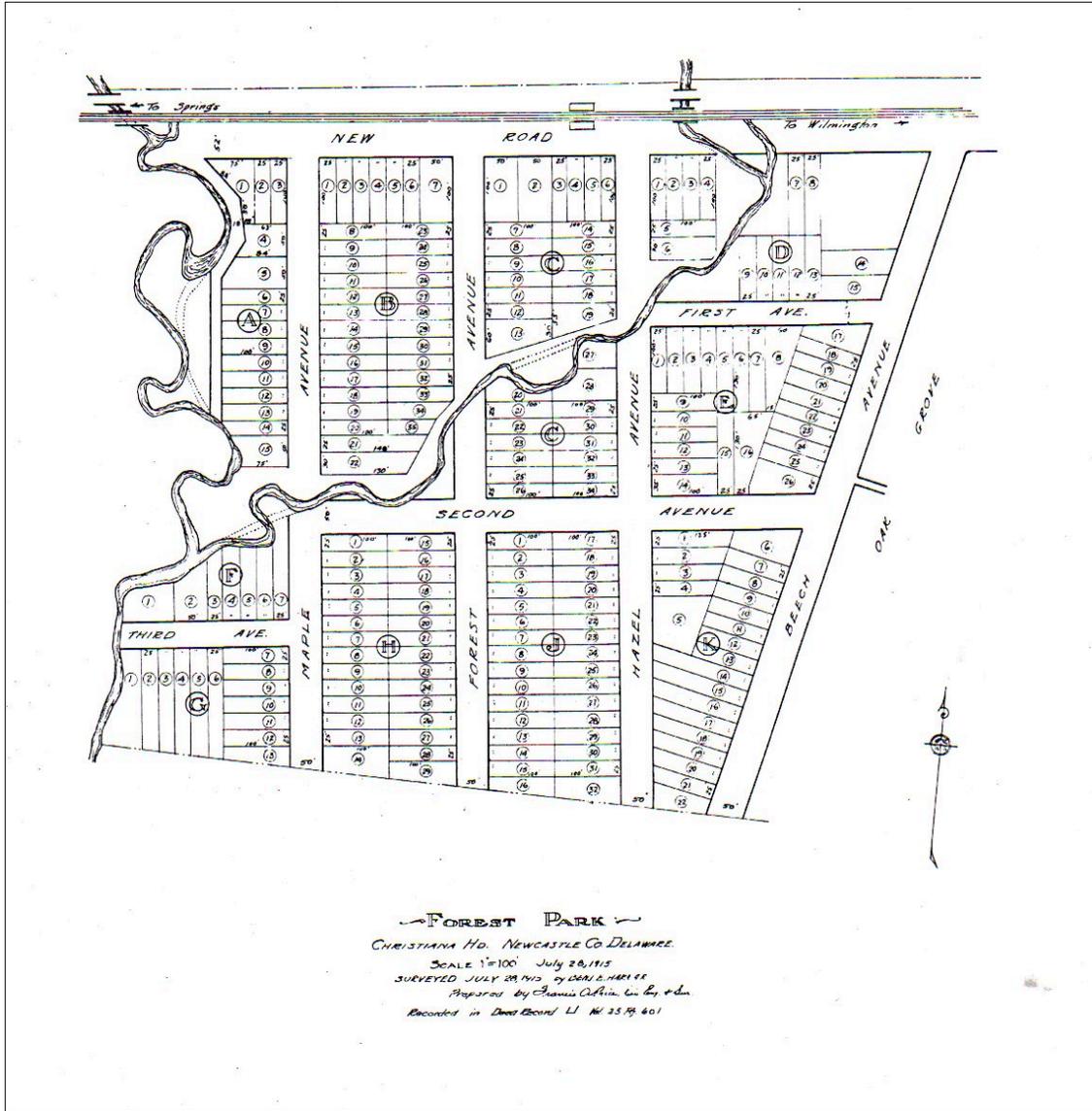


Figure 2.4. This early 20th century plat map illustrates the Forest Park development (Delaware Land Records, 1914a).

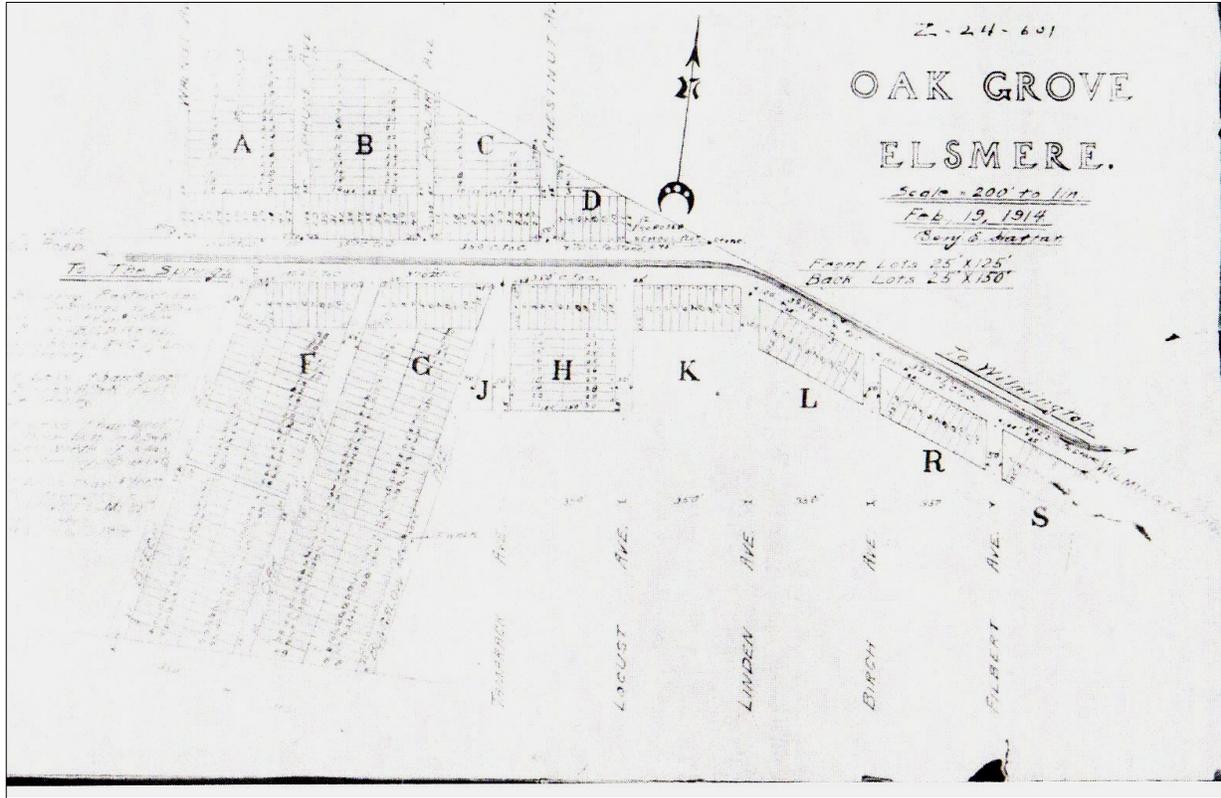


Figure 2.5. Early plat map of the Oak Grove subdivision (Delaware Land Records, 1914b).

Concurrent with the sale and ultimate subdivision of the Walter and Richardson lands were several transactions between the Oak Grove Company and the Delaware State Fair, Inc. In 1918 it was decided to relocate the state fair grounds to Elsmere from a site in the inner city. In April 1918, a sizable parcel of 50 17/100 acres was purchased from the Oak Grove Company for the purposes of the new fair grounds, and several other pieces of property were acquired including a small 26/100 acre parcel from the Baltimore and Philadelphia Railroad. An article in the September 2, 1918 issue of the Wilmington paper, the *Every Evening*, stated that the Elsmere fair grounds would be prepared in a “remarkable quick time” and the new race track “would show as good results as the old one.” By 1920 there were five new exhibit buildings along with the race track (see Figures 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8). A wide range of attractions, including auto, motorcycle, trotting races were accompanied by dog, horse, and cattle shows along with vaudeville and fireworks performances.



Figure 2.6. The photograph shows an oblique angle aerial view of the Delaware Fair Grounds in 1925 (Hagley Museum and Library).

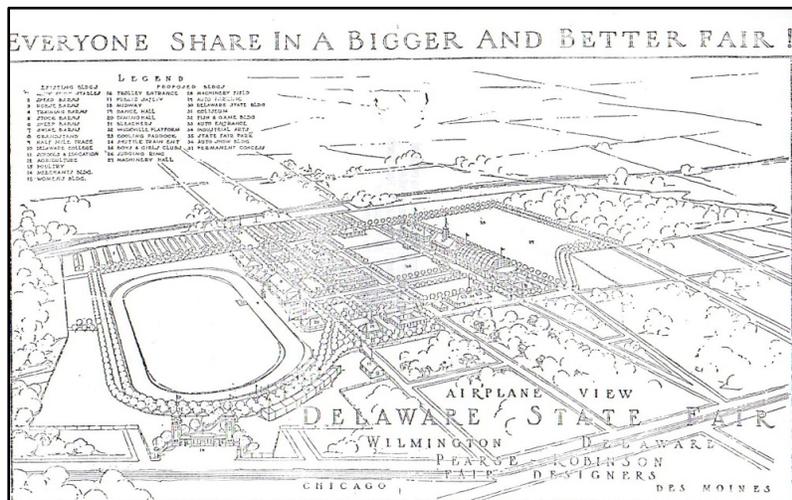


Figure 2.7. The graphic shows a conjectural aerial view of the Delaware Fair Grounds near Elsmere in 1924 (see Towers 1984).

Although the prospects for the future of the Delaware State Fair at Elsmere seemed bright and hopeful given the elaborate plan conveyed by the Chicago fair designers, Pearse and Robinson in 1924, it was decided to move the close the Elsmere location and move the fairgrounds south to Harrington. For years afterwards, the buildings and racetrack remained standing, as evidenced by the 1937 aerial of

Elsmere (see Figure 2.8). As demand for building lots continued through the mid twentieth century, the town's Forest Park and Oak Grove subdivisions were enlarged and spread over the former fair grounds to the south with Maple Avenue forming a dog-leg alignment on the south and west boundaries of the neighborhood (see Figure 2.9). Later aerial photographs in 1954 and 1964 capture the progression of construction along these platted streets.



Figure 2.8. The image shows an aerial view of Elsmere and former race track associated with the Delaware State Fair are still evident in 1937.

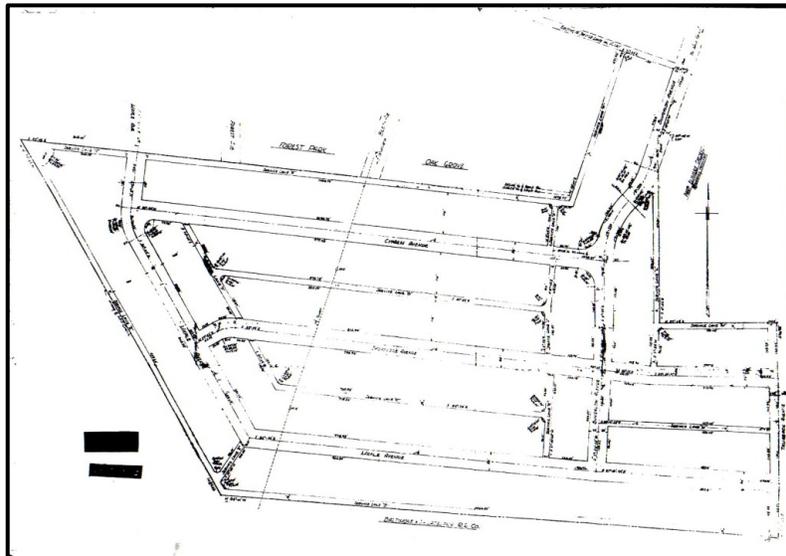


Figure 2.9. The plat shows the street plan associated with the subdivisions of Forest Park and Oak Grove in 1941 (Delaware Land Records, 1941).