

IV. HISTORIC CONTEXT OF THE BRIDGE 599 PROJECT AREA

The permanent settlement of the Bridge 599 project area can be traced to 1682, when William Penn became proprietor and awarded land grants to members of his family and friends (Griffitts 1998: 3). New Castle County was created in 1687 and was divided administratively into hundreds. Christiana Hundred comprised the part of New Castle County between Brandywine and Red Clay Creeks.

Early settlers in the area were primarily farmers who occupied 200-acre tracts (Griffitts 1998: 3). The agricultural economy intensified during the eighteenth century, aided by the development of a rudimentary road network. By the early 1800s, the region contained three major turnpikes, further increasing the efficiency of the agricultural economy.

The Red Clay Creek Valley has historically been a locus of early milling activity in New Castle County. The first sawmill was operating in this area as early as 1679 (Griffitts 1998: 3). Among the most important technological advances in this area was the development of the first automated milling system in America by Oliver Evans in 1785. (NCCDP 1989: 1-50)

In the early eighteenth century John Garrett, Sr. developed Red Clay Creek and Yorklyn into a seat of grist- and sawmills. He built a gristmill and sawmill at the present Auburn Mills site soon after his purchase of land from the Penn family in 1726 (Griffitts 1998: 3). Efforts to expand and diversify the operation during the mid- and late eighteenth century led John Garrett, Jr. to construct an additional gristmill along Red Clay Creek and a snuff mill downstream from the gristmill (Herman and Drossin 1979: 8.2). As early as 1783, a road was constructed from the Garrett Mill, across Red Clay Creek, to Hockessin Meeting House, located southwest of the mill in Mill Creek Hundred (Griffitts 1998: 7). This is present-day Bengé Road.

By 1805, the complex had come under the ownership of Horatio Gates Garrett, who changed the mill's focus from grain production to paper production. By 1812, the small enclave that developed around the Garrett paper mill, known as Auburn Mill, included the stone **Horatio Gates Garrett House (N-575)**, and housing for mill workers, such as the three-part dwelling known as "**The Bank**" (**N-466**) (Herman and Drossin 1979: 7.8). These structures stand on the west side of present Bengé Road, between SR 82 on the north and Red Clay Creek on the south. The paper mill buildings stood on the east side of Bengé Road. The complex included a millrace that ran in a generally north-south direction, before turning to the west near the mill buildings and Red Clay Creek.

In 1813, Thomas Lea bought the mill and converted it to a cotton spinning facility. It was at this time that the mill first became known as Auburn Mill (Griffitts 1998: 6). In addition to the Auburn Mill, the Yorklyn area supported the John Garrett snuff mill, also operating on Red Clay Creek, a short distance to the east of Auburn Mill.

Shortly before 1830, Lea sold the cotton mill property to his nephew Joseph Pusey (Griffitts 1998: 6). Bengé Road, along with the mill and mill workers' residences, are identified as the "J. Pusey and Son Cotton Factory" on the *Map of New Castle County, Delaware* produced by Samuel Rea and

Jacob Price in 1849 (Figure 3). The map also clearly shows the millrace, suggesting that a bridge on Benge Road over the millrace existed as early as the early to mid-nineteenth century.

In 1862, Pusey sold Auburn Mills to William and James A. Clark. Auburn Mill continued producing cotton for most of the nineteenth century. The mill complex and residences are depicted on the 1868 *Atlas of the State of Delaware* by D. G. Beers (Figure 4). Both Auburn Mill and the Garrett snuff mill profited from the establishment in 1872 of a station at Yorklyn along the Wilmington and Western Railroad (Griffitts 1998: 7).

The Auburn mill complex was partially destroyed by fire in 1880, but was substantially rebuilt soon thereafter (Herman and Drossin 1979: 8.4). The present Auburn Mill complex (N-1083) mostly dates from this late nineteenth-century building period. The 1881 *Map of New Castle County, Delaware* by G.M. Hopkins shows the Clark store, woolen mill, residence and workers' housing in the small community of Auburn/Yorklyn P.O. (Figure 5). It also clearly shows the millrace and Benge Road passing over it.

The most intensive period of activity and expansion of the Auburn Mill complex occurred between 1890 and 1910. Developments at this time included the construction of additional workers' housing along Benge Road and the addition of paper production facilities. In 1890, William Clark sold his holdings to Israel and Elwood Marshall, and S. Franklin Ewart, the three of whom converted the textile mill into a paper mill (Herman and Drossin 1979: 8.4). In 1897, Israel Marshall constructed his impressive Queen Anne-style house on a hill at the southwest corner of Benge Road and SR 82, a short distance north of the Bridge 599 project area (Herman and Drossin 1979: 8.4).

Soon after, Ewart sold his share to the Marshall brothers who subsequently patented a new type of paper made from fiber. In 1905 the brothers incorporated all of the enterprises into the National Fiber and Insulation Company. In 1922 the company's name was changed to the National Vulcanized Fiber Company, still in operation at this site today.

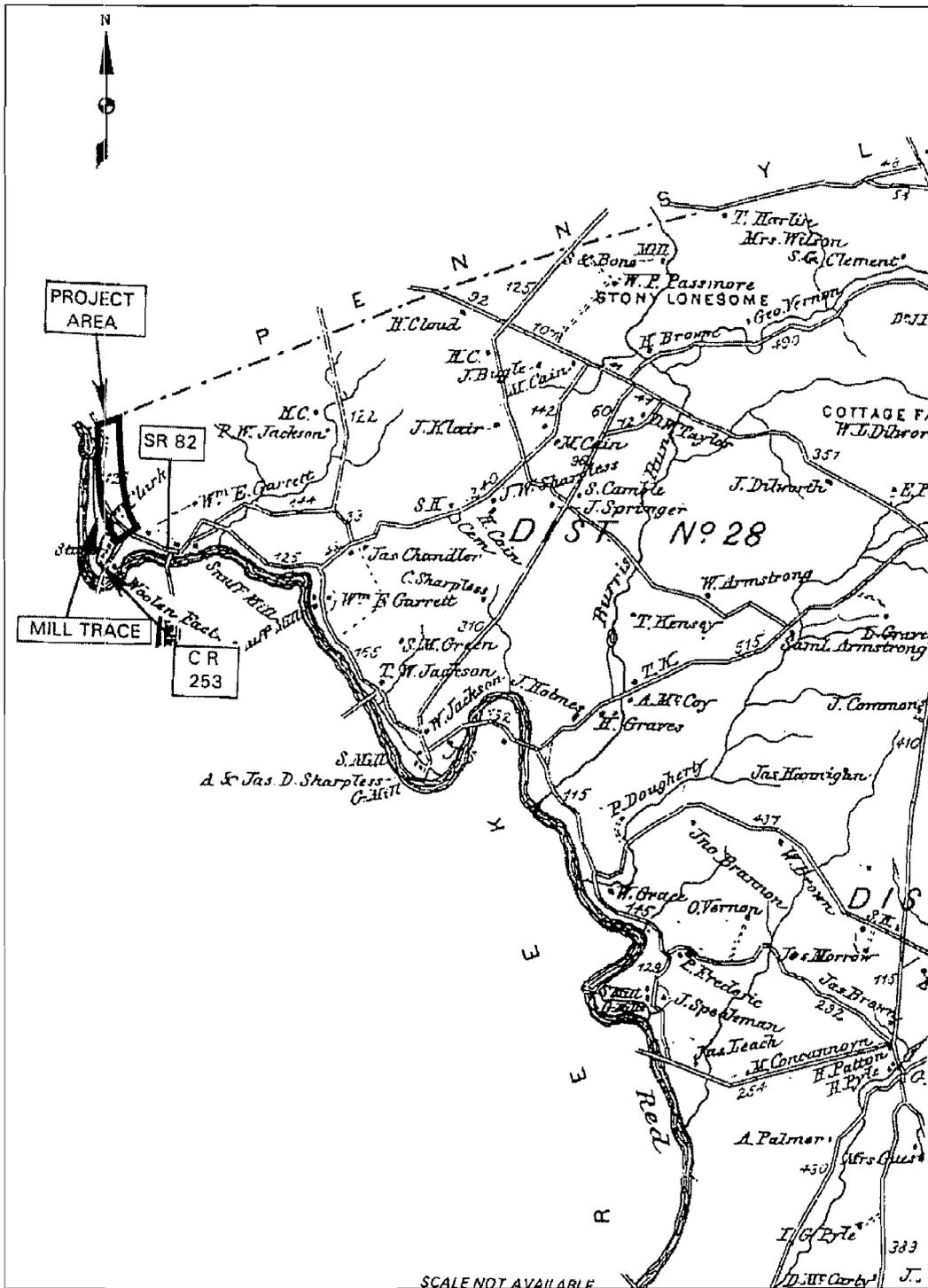
Few physical changes have occurred to the Auburn Mill or the surrounding residences since the 1920s. According to DelDOT records, Bridge 599 was constructed over the NVF millrace circa 1932, replacing at least one, if not more, previous bridges over this millrace at this location. Further to the south, a modern two-lane bridge was constructed on Benge Road over Red Clay Creek in the 1970s.

In 1979, the **Auburn Mills Historic District (N-5003)**, consisting of the Auburn Mill buildings, several workers' residences, the Horatio Gates Garrett House and the Israel Marshall House, was nominated and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



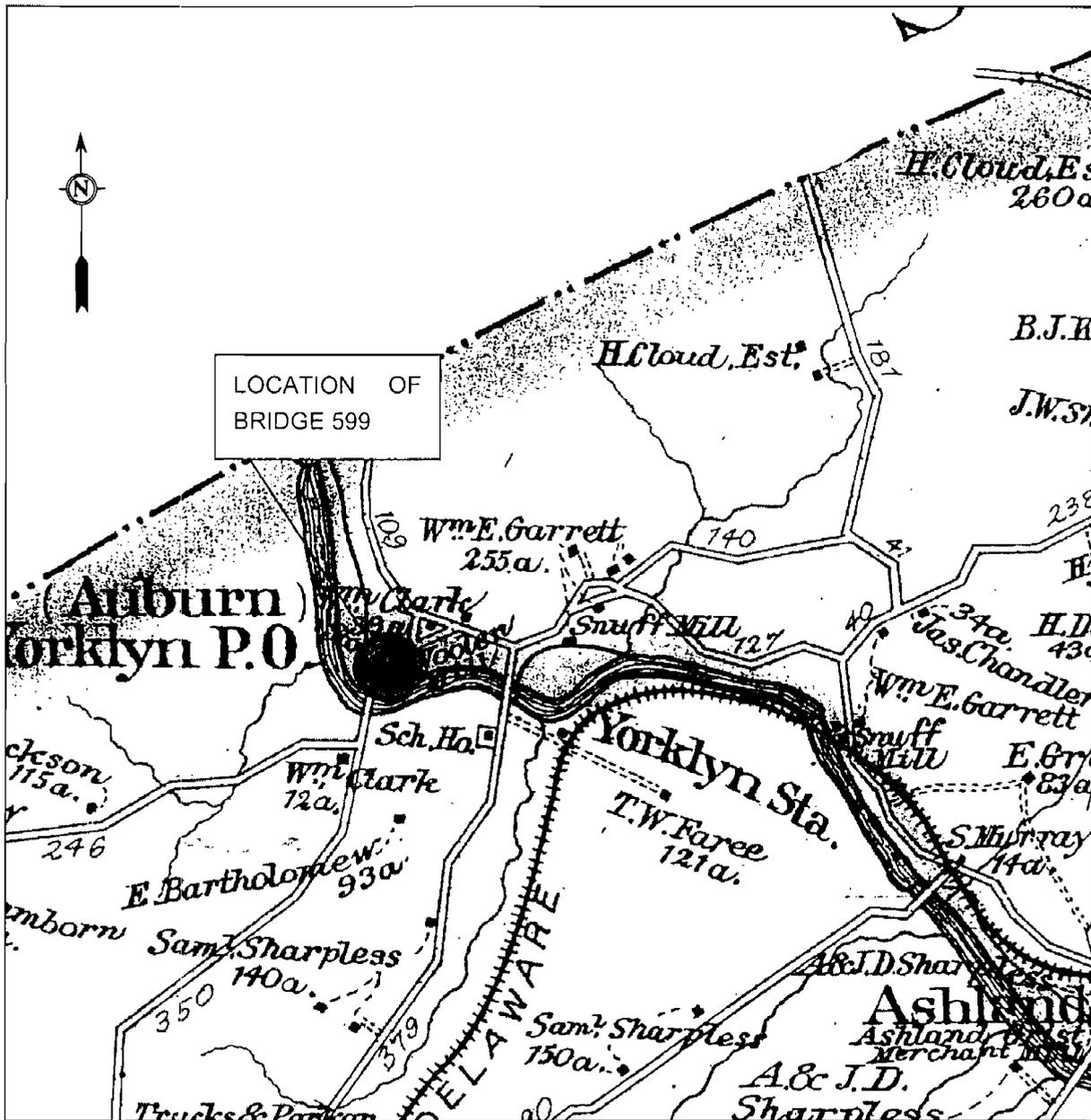
SOURCE: Price and Rea, 1849

Figure 3 Map of New Castle County Delaware (1849) Showing Bridge 599 Project Area



SOURCE: Beers, 1868

Figure 4
 New Topographical Atlas of the State of Delaware (1868)
 showing the Bridge 599 Project Area



SOURCE: GM Hopkins Co. Map of New Castle County, DE, Philadelphia, 1887

Figure 5 Map of New Castle County, Delaware (1881) Showing Bridge 599 Project Area