

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Physical geography and environment

Denney's Road runs roughly perpendicular to Fork Branch, the main branch of Saint Jones River north of Dover. The river here is a free-flowing freshwater perennial stream until it falls into the artificial impoundment at Silver Lake below Delaware State College. Mudstone Branch, Chance's Branch, and other minor tributaries flow into the river from the west.

Geologists report that the Pleistocene Columbia Formation is about twenty feet thick here, overlying the Miocene Calvert Formation (Pickett and Benson 1983). Sand and gravel of the Columbia Formation has had considerable economic importance. At the south end of the present project area is a deep borrow pit. Another borrow pit lies adjacent to the Conrail tracks near the north end of the proposed right-of-way. Jordan (1964) described the Columbia sediments as fluvial deposits, placed and shaped by a succession of different streams flowing down from the northern mountains during the Pleistocene.

Soils here belong to the Sassafras-Fallsington association. Sassafras soil, the dominant type, is well-drained and sandy, with a relatively low clay content (Soil Conservation Service 1971).

Interspersed among the well-drained high Sassafras fields in the project area are pockets and depressions consisting of such poorly-drained soils as Elkton silt loam, Woodstown sandy loam, Evesboro, and Fallsington. Although they are found within cultivated fields, these soil areas seldom produce crops as abundantly as Sassafras. The result is a patchwork of good and bad farming conditions, often requiring artificial drainage.

Prehistoric cultures of the region

Man has lived in the vicinity of the project area for ten millenia or more, under constantly changing ecological and cultural conditions. Delmarva is a relatively new landmass, from a geological point of view. One of the oldest dated environmental records associated with man in Delmarva comes from the Dill Farm (7K-E-12), where a tree trunk and pollen samples from ten millenia ago were found.

These earliest Paleo-Indian people were hunter-gatherers who used the finely-finished "fluted" points. Although they hunted large mammals, they probably used the entire larder provided by the grasslands and the spruce-hemlock forest that pioneered the Delmarva forest cover (Tirpak 1980).

After the Paleo period ended, about 8,500 years ago, Delaware's residents became more sedentary and more densely settled. Hardwood forests advanced, supplying smaller game animals, nuts, and berries. This period, known as the Archaic, is characterized by stone tools that exhibit variety of workmanship and diversity of purpose (Handsman and Borstel 1974). Grinding stones, mortars, and pestles appear for the first time on sites of this period, indicating increased reliance upon vegetable foods.

The Woodland I period, from about 3,000 BC to about 1,000 AD, is characterized by more sedentary lifestyles, larger populations, and the beginnings of horticulture (Custer, Catts, and Bachman 1982). During the Woodland periods, local people began to make pottery vessels. Agricultural development marked the Woodland II period, which ended with European conquest in the seventeenth century. (Custer, Jehle, Klatka, and Eveleigh 1984, page 10)

Postcontact history of the region

Delaware south of Bombay Hook was originally part of a Dutch grant called Swaanendael or Zwaanendael, which a company of New Netherland patroons tried unsuccessfully to colonize in 1631.

The first settlement in the Swaanendael patroonship was a whaling station near the mouth of Delaware Bay, possibly at the site where Lewes now stands. For the first half-century of settlement, Lewes was the center of population and seat of government on the bay below Bombay Hook. About 1670, Englishmen began settling in the valley of the Saint Jones (or Dover) River, previously known as Wolf Creek.

In 1680, responding to increased settlement, Governor Andros created the Saint Jones court jurisdiction between Bombay Hook and Cedar Creek. In 1683, William Penn chartered Kent County as the successor to the Saint Jones court. Penn ordered his surveyors to lay out a court town. A courthouse was built on the townsite in 1697, but the town of Dover was finally plotted in 1717 and replotted in 1722, when development began (Jackson 1983; Hancock 1975-76).

Eighteenth-century Kent County was a small-grain farming region, valued during the Revolution as a breadbasket for the Continental forces. Since many of the citizens, possibly a majority, were British sympathizers or Quaker pacifists, only a few minor skirmishes took place here.

In 1777, the legislature moved to Dover, thinking that the inland town would be safer from attack than the old riverfront capital of New Castle. The Delaware constitution of 1792 finally made provision for Dover to become the permanent capital. In a

tavern on the Dover Green, a Delaware convention on December 7, 1787 ratified the Federal Constitution. Because it was the first to ratify, Delaware, "the First State," has ceremonial precedence on all national occasions.

Depleted by generations of destructive farming practices, the sandy soil of Kent County became less productive during the Federal period. Post-revolutionary Delaware agriculture was marked by decreasing farm size and reduced productivity.

During the generation just before the Civil War, however, agriculture revived. The new era can be said to have begun in 1836, when the General Assembly authorized the first state geological survey under the direction of James C. Booth. He analysed the soils, sought sources of fertilizers, and advised farmers throughout the state.

This effort was part of a nationwide movement to apply scientific principles to the art of agriculture. Its adherents were called scientific farmers. Large scale, scientific farmers introduced grafted peach trees and systematic fertilization.

As farming became more profitable, scientific farmers assembled large holdings of prime farmland. Agriculture was transformed into a capital-intensive industry, a trend that was accelerated by the introduction of large and expensive labor-saving machinery. Delaware's many small ports expanded and prospered as centers for local commerce.

Philadelphia was Delaware's market center, and the focus of the state's commercial arteries until well into the twentieth century. The most important roads were therefore the ones that connected the hinterland with the ports and thence to Philadelphia. Denney's Road, connecting the Mudstone Branch mill to the port of Leipsic, was such an artery.

The Delaware Rail Road, finished to Dover in 1856, opened Kent County to national markets beyond Philadelphia and encouraged research and experiment into new farming and food processing methods. With the railroad came a population shift, from the port towns to the railroad towns. Many small stations were built where the old market roads crossed the railroad. DuPont Station was such a development (Passmore 1978).

Richardson and Robbins opened a cannery at Dover in 1855, processing local products. Other food processors located their plants along the railroad, until canning became Kent County's principal non-farm employment. Agriculture and related industries remained the area's principal economic base until the present century.

The first non-agricultural major industry in Dover was International Latex, now Playtex, in 1939. Since then, many light industries have located in the Dover area, some of them on or near Saulsbury Road.

As the railroad was superseded by the new north-south Route 13 corridor, population and business again refocused. Railroad villages declined in commercial importance as business clustered around the new corridor.

Previous work in the project area

The two remaining historic structures in the Fork Branch community are listed in the state inventory of historic sites maintained by the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. They are the Benjamin Durham homestead (plate 1, page ii) and the Little Union Church (cover). The only previous archaeological research in the immediate area was an excavation conducted in 1983 by one of the present authors (Heite 1984).

The Fork Branch community was a center for a minority population of racially ambiguous origin. Known locally as Moors, these people have long been considered to be a Native American remnant group whose ancestors may include Negroes and Caucasians as well. In their folklore, the Moors of Kent and Sussex and the closely related Nanticokes of Sussex claim variously to have been descended from a red-haired Irish lady and her Moorish slave, or from Moorish pirates or colonists who settled on the shores of the Delaware (Weslager 1943, pp. 27-30)

According to J. Thomas Scharf (1888), the Moors recognized themselves, and were recognized by their neighbors, as a distinct ethnic group at least as early as a century ago. Scharf described them as having settled in nearby Little Creek [now Kenton] Hundred in about 1710, and remarked that they had owned better than a thousand acres of land among them. The Durham family were among these early settlers (Scharf 1888, v. 2, p. 1124).

The main community of Moors in Kent County was and is in the town of Cheswold in nearby Kenton Hundred. Fork Branch, later duPont Station, was a subsidiary community.

Primary documentary research in project area

The name of Mudstone Branch is a corruption of Maidstone, a tract of 877 acres granted in 1681 to John Albertson and John Mumford. Maidstone lay to the west of the project area. A later owner built a mill on the tract, which eventually belonged to Charles I. duPont. His mill stood near the point where Mudstone Branch crosses the Dover-Kenton Road. The road now called Denney's Road usually bore the name of the mill owner. In nineteenth-century documents, this road is designated as the road from the mill to Leipsic. The Delaware Railroad maintained duPont Station, where Denney's Road crosses the railroad today (Scharf 1888, v. II, p. 1082; Beers 1868, 44).

The road network

Denney's Road (Route 100) is one of the oldest east-west roads in this part of Kent County. It developed as a ridge-road between Chance's and Mudstone branches, part of a route connecting the mill on Mudstone Branch with the port at Leipsic at a very early date.

The road's most distinctive feature is a deep horseshoe bend at the Fork Branch bridge. Just upstream of the bridge, the Fork Branch channel loses definition among the shallow streams and alluvial islands of an upland swamp. The bridge stands at the farthest point upstream where a simple single-span bridge could have been built with minimal filling.

The course of Denney's Road from Denney's Corner (State Road or Route 13), across the bridge, and around the bend to the Greenage lot (Figure 9), was established by the early nineteenth century; it has hardly moved since then. The course east of the bridge was indicated on the Thomas Denney estate survey of 1829, already in its present location.

West of the present site of the modern Greenage house, the road followed a slightly more southerly and considerably more winding course. In 1858, residents in the area petitioned to have the road straightened from the present site of the Greenage house to a new intersection along the Dover Kenton Road that would connect the road with the road to the hamlet of Dinah's Crossroads.

James Barber, a landowner along the road near its western terminus, objected to the new alignment. The proposal was reviewed and adopted by the Kent County Court of General Sessions. In 1859, the estimated cost of straightening the road was \$100.00, while the recommended damages to adjacent property owners was \$10.125.

Saulsbury Road, the other artery in the study area, is

relatively new. It was first proposed in 1875, and was described as beginning at the intersection of Division Street in Dover with Horse Head Road, and running parallel to the Delaware Rail Road until it intersected with the road from duPont Station to Morgan's Corner (Denney's Road).

That first proposed road was not built. In 1881, a new petition was presented, which proposed a road which would run from the Fox Hall Road to Denney's Road. This road was built in 1882.

Nine years later, local residents, including William McKee, who owned land in the project area, successfully petitioned to extend the road from Denney's Road to the Central Church road. David Brendlinger, who owned the Austin Smith farm at the time, was not one of the petitioners, even though the route bisected his property. Nor were any of the Fork Branch residents among the petitioners. These two segments are still in use as parts of Saulsbury Road.

The land and the people

The study area is composed of two parts, each with its distinct history. The larger part lies west of Fork Branch of Saint Jones River, and between Mudstone and Chance's branches in West Dover Hundred. The smaller part lies directly across the river in Little Creek Hundred.

Property locations and ownerships at various periods are shown on the maps, figures 4, 5, 9, and 13. Citations and descents of title will be found in Appendix 6.

The neck of land between Mudstone and Chance's branches and west of Fork Branch originally was known as Jolley's Neck. In 1735 William Handsor settled on this tract. His patent was granted in 1737. Handsor's survey and patent actually described only approximately the northerly half of the neck, in very rough terms, between the present Denney's Road and Chance's Branch. His adjoiningers were Nicholas Powell to the north and west, and Samuel Manlove to the south.

Manlove seems never to have taken up his patent. Later outsales of the Handsor descendants show that Jolley's Neck tract came to include most of the land between the branches, perhaps by default.

William Handsor died in 1768, leaving his land to his younger son Cornelius. In 1773, Cornelius sold the northwestern part of his land to Benjamin Wells; Jonathan and Rachel Handsor, his brother and sister, later signed quitclaims to this portion in 1776 and 1788.

In 1774, Cornelius sold the rest of his land to his older brother Nehemiah. This sale was described in terms of the original patent and on paper was but a narrow strip along the patent's southern boundary. In fact, it comprised the area from a point a little to the north of Denney's road to Mudstone Branch and extended beyond the present Saulsbury Road to the west of the project area.

Benjamin Wells, Jr. inherited the northwestern part of Jolley's Neck and in 1802 deeded it to Thomas Denney in order to discharge his father's debt. Denney acquired more of the Handsor land to the east during his lifetime. Upon Denney's death in 1827, the boundaries of his tract were finally established by survey. Denney's executors apparently were aware of the discrepancy between the definition of Jolley's Neck in the deeds and the parcel's actual boundaries, for the original patent line and Cornelius Handsor's sale to Nehemiah Handsor were marked on the Denney estate division plot.

Neither Thomas Denney nor his heirs lived on the land, however. It carried a low value; in assessments the farm was described as being "in poor condition". Denney conveyed small parts of the east end of this land to John Lockerman, a free Negro, and another to Benjamin Durham. Eventually, Hugh Durham, son of Benjamin, came to own the land near the bridge over Fork Branch.

Denney's heirs sold the larger parcel to John Reed, a prominent Kent Countian who already had purchased much of the southeastern part of Jolley's Neck. In 1828, Reed also bought Hugh Durham's land and sold part of it to Angelica (Gelico Ann) Lockerman Hansor in 1843. When Reed died, the tract north of Denney's Road passed to his daughter Angelica Killen Reed, who deeded it to her mother Mary Reed shortly thereafter.

Mary Reed sold the parcel north of Denney's road to John McClary. It passed rapidly through the hands of several owners. Finally, William G. Buss (Bush), grandfather of the present owner, bought the part that lies within the project area. This tract is known as the Austin Smith Farm, after an uncle of the present owner who owned it for many years.

The portion that Nehemiah Handsor bought from his brother in 1774 in fact (if not on paper) lay roughly on both sides of the present Saulsbury Road between Denney's Road and Mudstone Branch. To the west, it included the land between Denney's Road and Mudstone Branch, roughly the present Covington tract (Figure 4).

Nehemiah Handsor died in 1785. His son Nehemiah, Jr., inherited half of the tract and his wife Johannah inherited the rest. The son's tract was described as "A tract ... on the North side of the South Main Branch of Dover River in the Fork of

Joneses to be divided by the drain called Caleb Slash being the same whereon he now lives." The tract was entailed. Johannah Handsor received the land west of Caleb Slash, which was the home tract. Caleb Slash is a ditch that lies partly along and partly to the west of the present Saulsbury Road.

By 1815 the Nehemiah Handsor, Jr., portion of the land had come into the possession of Elizabeth Handsor Durham and her husband Benjamin. Elizabeth probably was the daughter of Nehemiah, Jr. In that year she sold about a third of her land to Nicholas G. Williamson, who already had gained possession of Johannah Handsor's adjacent land west of Caleb Slash.

Before his death in 1815, Benjamin Durham had evidently agreed to sell all or part of his remaining Handsor land to James Williams. Williams petitioned to have the land viewed and partitioned, but the court commissioners concluded that the land could not be divided without damage. Instead, Handsor Durham, Benjamin's heir, sold the western half of the remainder to William Keith (or Ruth). He sold the rest, which lay in the fork of Mudstone Branch, to his brother Hugh Durham.

John Reed ultimately obtained all the former Handsor land south of Denney's Road, except for a small parcel at the confluence of Fork and Mudstone branches that remained in the hands of a younger Benjamin Durham (c.1814-1888). This Benjamin probably was the grandson of Benjamin and Elizabeth Handsor Durham. He may have been Handsor Durham's son, but the evidence is inconclusive.

When the Delaware Railroad was built, it passed through the Benjamin Durham remnant, leaving a small isolated sliver to the west. Durham sold this orphaned parcel to the then owners of the larger tract, Zadock and George Townsend. Later he sold the remainder east of the railroad to Mary Shores. This is the Dover Products plant site today.

The former Reed holdings south of Denney's road were eventually bought by William McKee, who emigrated from Brandywine Hundred in 1865. McKee operated a store at duPont Station and farmed as resident landowner until early in the present century. His descendants still own the portion of the farm west of Saulsbury Road. McKee sold a part where the cemetery and firing range are now located. His descendants, the Covingtons, later sold the present Peterseil tract.

Small remnants of Jolley's Neck around the present church site were owned by Handsor descendants well into the nineteenth century. These remnant holdings became the Fork Branch, or duPont Station, community.

The descent of these parcels is unclear through the first two

decades of the nineteenth century. Some of the remnant properties passed out of the hands of the Handsor/Durham descendants and then passed in again through marriage or by other means.

Discrepancies between the Jolley's Neck patent description and the way the land actually lay can account for part of the confusion. In the early years of the nineteenth century Thomas Denney deeded part of the eastern end of his tract to Benjamin Durham the elder. At about the same time he deeded an adjacent piece to John Lockerman, who was described as a free Negro. John Lockerman's wife inherited his land and sold part of it in 1835.

John Lockerman's wife was known variously as Angelica Lockerman, Ann Lockerman, Angelica Hansor, and Gelico Ann Hansor, as well as several variations on these spellings. She appeared in the tax lists as Ann Loockerman in 1810, suggesting that John Lockerman probably died in 1809 or 1810. His executor was Benjamin Durham the elder. She apparently married James Hansor who was certainly at least a cousin of Elizabeth Handsor Durham. James Hansor died in 1819, and his executors were Ann Hansor and Hugh Durham. James Hansor was a tenant of Thomas Denney, although probably not on the Jolley's Neck property. His inventory included "corn & fodder in the ground of Thomas Denney."

By about 1835, Gelico Ann (or Angelica) Hansor had obtained most of the land between the confluence of Fork and Chance's branches and Denney's Road. The greatest part of this was swamp land. It included her inheritance from Lockerman and part of Hugh Durham's land.

Later, in 1843, she bought the land between her property and the Fork Branch bridge from John Reed; this was formerly Hugh Durham's. Within a few years, this tract became the nucleus of the Fork Branch community.

During Gelico Ann Handsor's ownership, houses stood along the north side of Denney's Road toward Chance's Branch. Hugh Durham had lived on this land. Gelico Ann's deed to John Stites in 1835 mentioned one of that property's corners as lying near "the remains of Hugh's old cabin." Later, when she bought land from John Reed in 1843, one of the corners was described as "a chestnut tree on the east side of a spring near the lot where Angelica Hansor now lives." Later, in 1848, Gelico Ann agreed to sell the part of her land adjacent to the Fork Branch bridge to William Durham. The roadside boundary was described as beginning at the bridge and running to a peach tree "a few yards beyond where the new house now stands."

Gelico Ann also sold part of the western end of her property to James Corney [Carney] in 1848. After Angelica Hansor's death, William Durham confirmed this sale on behalf of her estate. In 1855 Carney sold the parcel to Samuel McClary. It was part of the

present Austin Smith farm until a portion was conveyed to Thomas and Annabelle Greenage in 1954.

Gelico Ann retained the middle portion of her land, including the site where Little Union Church now stands. When she died in 1852 she left the bulk of her estate to Sally Ann (also called Sarah) Cambridge, whom she described in her will as "a girl whom I reased [sic]." Miss Cambridge was noted as a resident in the 1868 Beers Atlas, next door to the church. Two other buildings were noted, both at that time owned by George Chandler, who had by then bought most of Jolley's Neck north of Denney's Road.

Miss Cambridge sold her lot next to the church to Robert and Hester Carney in 1889, and the lot just west of that lot to George and Sina Moseley a few years later. Miss Cambridge's heir was Margaret Durham, who confirmed these sales.

At present, most of the bottomland along Fork Branch is part of the Austin Smith (Bush) farm, and the Reichhold Chemical Company properties. Four lots occupy the high ground on the northeast side of Denney's Road. Only one house is standing, a modern house.

Within living memory, the community contained two houses and a church on the northeast side of Denney's Road; the school, a house, and a railroad station stood west of the railroad on the south side of Denney's Road. Elmer Bender's blacksmith shop stood on the present Dover Products property; two houses, one a modern office, now stand on that tract in addition to the plant. Of the original nineteenth-century hamlet, only the church and the older house on the Dover Products property still stand (Figure 13).

The Fork Branch community never extended across to the east side of Fork Branch. That tract was originally part of the extensive grant called "The Range," which was first warranted in 1688. Lewis Gano purchased part of this tract in 1756 (Scharf 1888, v. 2, pp. 1082-1083). The straight portion of Denney's Road near Route 13 marks the north boundary of The Range.

Thomas Denney acquired the Gano property, as well as a small piece of land to the north along Fork Branch. J. P. M. Denney inherited the property and lived on it for much of his adult life. This is the "E" parcel in the Denney division (figure 5). Present occupants of the Denney tracts include Delaware Technical and Community College and Kent County Vocational-Technical School.

The small part of the Denney land that lay between Denney's Road and Fork Branch eventually became part of the Bush property.

Although J. P. M. Denney, Thomas Denney's grandson, lived on the farm to the south and east of Denney's Road, the Denney family cannot be called part of the Fork Branch community. Thomas Denney

occasionally served as appraiser of the estates of several of his neighbors and as John Durham's administrator. In that role, he succeeded to the guardianship of William Handsor's daughter Rachel. But aside from these occasional duties and his deeding of small parcels of land to Benjamin Durham and John Lockerman, the Denney family had little traceable involvement with the Fork Branch community. Some of them were tenants on his farms, however.

Descendants of William Handsor a century and a half after his patenting of the Jolley's Neck tract had been reduced to small subsistence farmers on the fringes of his original patent. A large part of the land which remained in their hands was regarded as useless swamp. In terms of landholding, they experienced a serious decline in status. This decline is evident also in their inventories. William Handsor, the clan's progenitor, left personal goods worth 71 pounds in 1767, including pewter mugs, a sword, a fiddle, carpenter's and shoemaker's tools, in addition to a full complement of farming equipment.

His son Nehemiah's personal goods were worth 91 pounds in 1785. Benjamin Durham, who married Nehemiah's granddaughter, left personal goods worth \$264.72, and which included two books, saddles, riding horses, and a full complement of farming tools. It is apparent that these people were comfortable if not wealthy.

In sharp contrast, Gelico Ann Hansor's estate was worth a meager \$36.30 in 1852. She owned no luxuries worth mentioning separately, and her most valuable possessions were a pig and a hog.

Community institutions

The Fork Branch community was never large, and it consisted almost entirely of people who shared an ethnic identity. Only the seeds of an identifiable community nexus existed before the railroad arrived in 1856, but by 1868 the atlas showed a hamlet developed around the bridge and station. The hamlet contained four houses, a store, a church, and a railroad depot. Early in the twentieth century a school was also built.

Weslager, in Delaware's Forgotten Folk, asserted that the present Little Union Church was "founded in a log building erected by some of the emigres from Sussex County and was later rebuilt." (Weslager 1943, p. 145). The exact historical sequence of church buildings has not been documented, but the 1868 atlas shows an "African church" on the site of the present building. The cemetery behind the church contains both unmarked fieldstone markers and carved headstones. Among those interred there are Benjamin (the younger) and Sally Ann Durham and a Cornelius Hansley. Weslager states that Hansley is a corruption of Handsor. The presence of a number of local individuals interred both behind the church and in

the new cemetery across the road calls into question Weslager's assertion that the church was founded by Sussex county immigrants.

Concerning the church, Scharf (1888, v. 2, p. 1087) states:

"Rev. Silas W. Murray, of Smyrna Circuit, organized a class at Little Union, Dupont Mills, about 1850, with eleven members, having Robert Kearney [Carney?] as their class-leader. They started in a slab shanty and afterwards built a log house, and established a Sunday-school. In 1883 the present chapel was built and there is a membership of 62 persons."

One Robert Carney received a deed to part of Gelico Ann's land west of the church from Miss Cambridge in 1889. Since the name "Kearney" is pronounced "Carney", this is probably the person mentioned by Scharf. No deed to the church property has come to light.

Indian descendants were considered mulattoes at law. They were not permitted to attend white schools and consistently refused to send their children to black schools. Around the beginning of the present century these people began to set up their own elementary schools. This move benefitted from Pierre duPont's effort to upgrade school facilities for both whites and nonwhites throughout Delaware.

Again, the exact date of foundation of Fork Branch school, later known as duPont 145-c, is not known. However, Charles Brown, who also served as a school trustee, sold the school lot to H. Rodney Sharp, a duPont associate, in 1920. The school was still in operation in 1943, when it had, according to Weslager, "forty-three pupils all but a few of whom are Moors" (Weslager 1943, p. 147). Weslager referred to this building as the "new school," a name also used by a local informant when interviewed for the present study. There was an older school.

The school served as a community focus. A PTA had been established by 1922 and in that year claimed ten members. In 1924 the organization had elected officers and beginning the next year it raised funds and purchased equipment for the school. Purchases included an oil stove, lamps, books, playground equipment, phonograph records, pictures, a piano, and a cookstove and kitchen equipment for the serving of hot lunches. The PTA grew to 24 members by 1932. In that year, in the depth of the Great Depression, a subsidiary of the PTA, called the Willing Workers, maintained flower and vegetable gardens at the school. Both groups donated money to needy families, and the Willing Workers provided clothing for children who would not otherwise have been able to attend school (Service Citizens PTA yearbooks, Delaware Archives).

Year:	1735	1740	1745	1750	1755	1760	1765	1770	1775	1780	1785	1790	1795	1800	1805	1810	1815	1820	1825	1830	1835
Taxable:	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5
William Hanser	□	□□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□											
Nehemiah Hanser		□□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□□□□□	□□		□								
Jacob Hanser			□	□																	
Widow Hanser								□				□									
Nehemiah Handser, jr									□	□□	□										
Rachel Hanseah (Hanser)														NO	□						
Isaac Durham								□	□□□□	NN		N	NO			N					
Daniel Durham									□□□□	□□	□					N	M	N			
Benjamin Durham									□□□□	□	□	□	□			N	M	□			
Richard Durham										N											
John Loockerman										N						N					
Ann Loockerman																	N	□	NN		
Hugh Durham																N			M□□		N
Hansor Durham																			NM□		
Eunice (Nicey) Durham														□							
Parker Durham														N							
Elizabeth Durham																			M		
James Hanser																			M□		
Elisha Durham																					
Benjamin Durham (minor)																					N
																					N
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	7	7	8	8	9	9	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	3
	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5	0	5

□ = no race given
M = Mulatto
N = Negro

Derived from assessment records for Dover Hundred, Kent County in the Delaware Archives. Absence from the sample does not indicate that the records are missing. Some extant records are inadequate for purposes of this report, and have been omitted

FIGURE 6
RACE PERCEPTION IN
THE FORK BRANCH
COMMUNITY
1735 - 1834

Race and ethnicity

At the end of the eighteenth century and lasting until quite recently, the perception of ethnic identity was a problem with serious consequences for the residents of the Fork Branch area. As early as 1888, Scharf reported that the Moors or Indian descendants of both Kent and Sussex counties regarded themselves as a separate people from either their black or their white neighbors. Not all of these neighbors concurred. However, Scharf implied that this sense of separateness had deep roots.

The earliest residents at Fork Branch were not identified by race in the records that were searched for this project. Usually the absence of racial identity in American historical documents is assumed to mean that the subject was Caucasian. It may be more accurate to suppose that the record keeper considered the subject to be of the dominant racial group, or at least not sufficiently different that the differences were worth noticing. However, the circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that these people belonged to the remnant group later known as Nanticokes. This ambiguity is not a local phenomenon, but is found wherever such communities exist (Berry 1963).

William Handsor probably came from Sussex County, where many Handsor baptisms and marriages are listed in the eighteenth-century records of Saint George's Chapel. Many of these people were noted as mulattoes, a term which (according to the Oxford English Dictionary) at that time meant any racial mix including Native American ancestry.

C. A. Weslager considered Handsor (and its variant spellings) to have been the root of the Nanticoke surname Hansley, although he gave no reason for his assertion and did not trace the changes. Hansleys are buried at Fork Branch in the old cemetery behind the church. If the Kent County Handsors were of mixed Indian stock, they were acculturated by the time William settled on Jolley's Neck. William Handsor knew how to work within the English legal system. He patented land and left a detailed will. Only the Sussex church records and the subsequent fate of his descendants suggest that he may have been in any way different from the majority of his neighbors.

William Handsor apparently followed the trade of shoemaker and trained his eldest son Nehemiah in that work. In his will in 1769 he left his shoemaker's tools to Nehemiah and his farm to a younger son, Cornelius. To Jonathan, who seems to have been very young in 1769, he left "his grandmother's iron pot." Either that was a magnificent vessel or it had great sentimental value.

Events of a grand and unconscious scale impacted upon the Fork Branch people in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth. In the flush of the American Revolution, attitudes

toward non-Caucasians underwent some liberalization throughout the settled part of the United States. Abolitionist movements began in a number of places; Delaware's was one of the first.

However, the nationwide outbreak of slave revolts which began in the 1790's and lasted into the 1830's frightened the majority white population. By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, old racial laws had been hardened and new ones were written. These laws were especially stringent in the slaveholding states, including Delaware. For the most part, these laws recognized two races: Negro and Caucasian. Mulattoes, in the modern sense of mixed white and Negro, formed a subsidiary class of Negroes and were subjected to the same body of laws. In the parts of the United States from which Native Americans had long since ceased to be a political force of any substance, the dominant white population tended to lump Native American remnants with free blacks and mulattoes.

The first attempt to legally establish the origins of the mixed-race communities occurred in 1856. Levin Sockum, a storekeeper and a Sussex County Nanticoke, was tried for selling powder and shot to one of his neighbors, also a Nanticoke. Delaware law forbade sale of such items to free blacks and mulattoes, but the actual designation under which these people fell was not by any means a matter of consensus. Delaware law recognized only Negro, white, and mulatto as racial designations and considered mulatto to mean a person with any Negro ancestry. George Purnell Fisher, prosecutor in the Levin Sockum case, commented,

"The question on which the case turned was whether Harman [the purchaser] was really a free mulatto, and the genealogy of that race of people was traced by Lydia Clark, then about 87 years of age, who was of the same race of people." (Scharf 1888, v.2, p. 1271)

Mrs. Clark related that about 150 years earlier a red-haired Irish woman married her Moorish slave, and their children intermarried with the local Indians. The jury considered this testimony sufficient proof of mixed Negro ancestry to legally classify Harman and his fellows as free mulattoes. This classification stood until 1881. Sockum responded to the legal affront by moving to New Jersey.

While the gist and possibly the substance of Lydia Clark's testimony may be accurate, the timing Judge Fisher ascribed to the origin of the Sussex people is unlikely at best.

In 1875, Indian descendants in Delaware were included in a tax imposed on freedmen to support the colored school system. Under an 1881 law passed at the instigation of a number of Nanticokes, people who could prove Native American background were exempted

from the colored school tax (Weslager 1983, pp. 215-219).

Little primary historical research has been conducted regarding the Kent County community. Secondary sources are ambiguous as to the relationships between Kent's Moors and Sussex County's Moors and Nanticokes. Both Scharf and Weslager state that the two communities were closely related; at other points, they state that the two areas had little contact and were even mildly hostile. We have not searched the records for Kent Countians who applied for the exemption from the colored school tax, which specifically applied to Sussex. Such a search was outside the scope of the present project; for now it is sufficient to illustrate the attitudes of the dominant community toward their mixed-race neighbors.

One cannot deny that families in the two counties have been related for many generations, but the present study did not uncover evidence whether the Kent County community ever tried to classify themselves at law as Indians, or were content to maintain their separate identity through custom and social practice.

A number of excellent histories deal with the changing attitudes of whites towards their non-white neighbors. Flight and Rebellion by Gerald W. Mullen (1972) describes the beginning of this change and the slave rebellions of the 1790's in the South. Roll, Jordan, Roll (Genovese 1972) is a now-classic study of the interactions between white and non-white societies during the nineteenth century before the Civil War. Morgan's American Slavery American Freedom (1975) describes the colonists' attitudes toward non-whites before the Revolution.

This change in the perception of the identity of the Fork Branch residents and their relatives is clearly illustrated in the West Dover / Saint Jones Hundred tax lists for the period in question (Figure 6). The early, relatively wealthy, Handsors were not identified by race. Beginning in the 1780's, a few Handsors and Durhams began to be identified variously as mulattoes or as free Negroes. However, none were consistently identified by the assessors as anything in particular. Close relatives were assigned to different categories in the same year, and individuals shifted category from year to year with no apparent pattern. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, descendants of William Handsor were most often identified in the assessments as free Negroes and occasionally as mulattoes. Occasionally, the more general term "colored" was used as a descriptor in documents.

It seems hardly a coincidence that the Handsor heirs' racial status became ambiguous in the records at the same time that they sold off the major portions of their Jolley's Neck holdings to non-resident white large-scale farm operators. By the 1820's, the descendants of the original patentee were subsistence farmers on marginal land around the fringes of Jolley's Neck, while the best

fields were in the hands of others. Also, by the 1820's, these same people whose ancestors had been perceived as Caucasian or whose racial identity had not mattered, were consistently identified as either free Negro or mulatto.

The process of ethnic identification is complex and has been addressed by anthropologists studying living cultures somewhat more successfully than by archaeologists. It is not uncommon for a population's self-identification to stand somewhat at odds with the identification imposed by an external source. This matter, and the problem of clearly identifying ethnic patterning in archaeological remains, are discussed in "Approaches to Ethnic Identification in Historical Archaeology" by M. C. S. and R. E. Kelley.

Kelley and Kelley pointed out that ethnic identification is a psychological function, and that psychological processes may leave no material remains. Moreover, group identification may not be obvious to outside observers. They cited statements of ethnographers in the 1960's that the Halchidoma Indians of Arizona had ceased to exist, and had been subsumed into the more numerous Maricopa among whom they lived. That assertion was disputed by a number of Halchidomas in the 1970's (Kelley and Kelley 1980, p. 135).

The situation is analogous to the disjuncture between the dominant white community's perception of the people at Fork Branch and elsewhere, and their perception of themselves. As Kelley and Kelley point out, "Identity is very complex."

Delaware's obviously interrelated but ambiguously-defined racial minorities may never be neatly classified and defined, but further study of the Fork Branch extended families may help to add significant parts to the picture. Since the Handsor-Durham kinship group are well documented for the period when perception of these groups began to form evidence to be found here may add to the understanding of how they came into existence.