

## **II. BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

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### **A. Physical Geography/Environment**

The project area is located in Georgetown. According to the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (1989), this area is known as the Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp. This Low Coastal Plain Zone has moderately-well to poorly drained soil, with a subsoil of sandy clay or loam.

### **B. Historic Context**

#### **Early History**

Georgetown was established in 1792 after petitioners from all over Sussex County demanded that the county seat be removed from Lewes and placed in an area that was accessible by all. Pettijohn's field was chosen because of its central location and the fact that it was "16 miles from anywhere". This location satisfied the people and Georgetown was laid out. The town began for governmental and political reasons, and remains the county seat today.

#### **Urbanization and Early Suburbanization: 1880-1940 +/-**

Delaware was centrally located in what was known as the "Middle Atlantic Trucking Region" during the 1920s (Doerrfeld, p. 11). In excess of 900 miles long, this region extended from the coast of Maine southward to the Low Country of South Carolina (Doerrfeld, p. 11). Averaging only 50 miles in width, this truck farming corridor owed its existence to three factors: the string of large cities and towns situated on the east coast which served as ready markets, soils ideally suited for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, and the "mild, semi-marine climate, having long frost-free seasons" due to the regulating effects of the Atlantic Ocean (Doerrfeld, p. 11). In 1924, the du Pont Highway (or U.S. Route 13 and U.S. Route 113) was constructed; this roadway functioned as a vital north-south transportation artery for the state and further enhanced Delaware's truck farming economy (Williams, p. 112; Federal Writers' Project, p. 81). As Coleman du Pont's desire for a "road of the future" matured into fruition, and the State Highway Department was established by a 1917 session of the Legislature, the state of Delaware was positioned for commercial growth (Federal Writers' Project, pp. 80-81). By c.1920, improved roadways meant that strawberries could be picked "in the early morning, loaded into crates and packed for market by midday and be in Philadelphia and New York by evening, there to be sent to retail stores in time for the next morning's contingent of shoppers" (Collins & Eby, p. 207). Crops such as strawberries, apples, sweet potatoes, corn and tomatoes were grown in southeastern Delaware, but peaches, which had been a boon to many Sussex County farmers in the 1860s, were decimated by disease in the early 1890s (Doerrfeld, p. 11). During the 1890s, the canning industry likewise shifted focus away from peaches to the canning of tomatoes, corn and peas (Doerrfeld, p. 11). The invention of the sanitary can and associated processing equipment rendered the hand-made can of the nineteenth century obsolete (Doerrfeld, p. 11). By the 1940s, the advent of frozen foods supplanted the popularity of canned goods, and many

canneries heeded the capitalist imperative and closed by the end of World War II when profits evaporated (Doerrfeld, p. 1).

In Georgetown, the Junction and Breakwater Railroad began operations in 1868. This spurred some industry in the form of the Fruit Preserving Company in 1875 (Wade, p. 35). In 1883, Charles H. Treat came to town and acquired the fruit preserving plant, incorporating it as the C.H. Treat Manufacturing Company. The three-ply veneer products included butter and pie dishes. In addition, Mr. Treat continued to can and preserve vegetables. Treat also opened the Sussex Manufacturing Company in 1885, which manufactured machinery for various industries. Several hundred people from Georgetown and the surrounding area were employed by these companies. In fact, housing was provided for some workers who were “imported” (Wade, p. 41).

During this time, two real estate agencies, two insurance agencies, two ice cream parlors, one jeweler, one drug store and four general merchandise stores were in operation within the town limits of Georgetown. In addition, railroad car repair shops were moved to Georgetown from Lewes in 1884 (Wade, p. 42).

After the C.H. Treat Manufacturing Company burned down in 1889 and the bank refused to extend any additional loans, Mr. Treat left Georgetown at the insistence of the townspeople who did not want their town to become an industrial site (Wade, p. 44).

In an effort to modernize Georgetown in 1888, the roadways and sidewalks were improved, as well as the public square (Wade, p. 46). By 1894, the telephone lines were extended to Georgetown, however a water works and electrical power would not arrive until after the turn of the century (Wade, p. 47).

The T. Coleman DuPont Highway (Route 113) was completed from Maryland to Georgetown in 1917 (Wade, p. 59). Georgetown has not changed much since 1925, it is still a quiet, rural county seat. The school system was modernized in the district during the first quarter of the century (Wade, p. 67).

Several WPA and CCC projects were conducted in Georgetown during the depression. These projects provided work for townspeople, as well as bringing an influx of new people to the area. Many of the men who filled the CCC Camps went on to marry local girls and stay in the area (Wade, p. 73).

Due to the surrounding farming operations, it is likely that many agricultural complexes existed on the outskirts of Georgetown. Today, however, there are mainly early to mid-twentieth century buildings, with a smattering of I-Houses remaining as vestiges to the agricultural past.

Existing Agricultural Complexes from the period of Industrialization and Early Urbanization 1830-1880 +/- were modified as a result of the exploding broiler industry during the time of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880 – 1940 +/-). Pre- and post-railroad I-houses typically underwent modifications in the twentieth century. An example of an I-House in the project area is 22092 Route 9 (S-3156). The house has a rear ell addition and is clad in vinyl siding. A wide variety of extant agricultural

outbuildings helps contribute to the overall significance of an Agricultural Complex, illustrates changing farming practices over time, and serves as a tangible reminder of the many different agricultural pursuits in which Georgetown Hundred farmers were engaged. Two mid-20<sup>th</sup> century storage buildings are the only extant outbuildings at S-3156. The presence of newer agricultural outbuildings does not necessarily hurt the overall integrity of an Agricultural Complex, provided that other structures are found intact on the property that date to the Period of Significance of the overall Complex. Adapting the criteria first used in August 1998 by the Center for Historic Architecture and Design (CHAD) at the University of Delaware for their evaluation of farm complexes for the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation (DALPF), as well as using the Agricultural Complex property type first developed in De Cunzo and Garcia's *Historic Context: The Archaeology of Agriculture and Rural Life, New Castle and Kent Counties, Delaware 1830-1940*, Agricultural Complexes found in the Route 9/Road 319 project area potentially eligible for the *National Register of Historic Places* should retain both integrity and significance as a farmstead.<sup>1</sup> Broadly, farmhouses should retain integrity of materials, design, feeling and workmanship, and should exhibit their original building form, in spite of modern additions or alterations (Sheppard, et al., p. v). Intact Agricultural Complexes achieve significance under Criterion A for their ability to convey information or exhibit trends concerning Delaware's agricultural development. In order to be recommended eligible under Criterion A, an Agricultural Complex needs to exhibit a relationship between agricultural structures and buildings that adds something new or significant to the Historic Context of agricultural development in Georgetown Hundred, Sussex County, or the State of Delaware, or to national agricultural trends within its Period of Significance as a farmstead. If a particular property lacks overall significance and integrity as a farmstead, individual property types may be eligible for inclusion separately in the *National Register of Historic Places*.<sup>2</sup>

Colonial Revival-style, single-family residences are found within the Route 9/Road 319 project area.<sup>3</sup> With accentuated front façade entries with pediments supported by pilasters or simple wood columns, sometimes surrounded by fanlights or sidelights, these dwellings have a decidedly balanced feel. Typically three, five, or seven bays in width, and two bays in depth, Colonial Revival houses with wood frame, double-hung sash windows with single and paired multi-pane glazing are the best representative examples of their type (McAlester, p. 321). Hipped roof, foursquare examples of Colonial Revival style residences with full-width front porches were popular forms from c.1895 through 1920, while side-gable types with simple accent details reigned from c.1905 until 1940 (McAlester, p. 325). Most of these vernacular forms of Colonial Revival style houses had either wood shingle siding, wood clapboard siding, or if the interpretation was executed in a high-style form, masonry. Most of the residences in the project area fall within this category; however, they are of a much later design bordering on Minimal Traditional.

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<sup>1</sup> Please reference the earlier discussion of Agricultural Complexes during the period of Industrialization and early Urbanization: 1830 – 1880 +/- on page 8-9 for additional information.

<sup>2</sup> The following agricultural property types are defined primarily on the basis of their architectural form, rather than usage. This discussion was included for instances where a particular Agricultural Complex may not be eligible, but individual structures may be individually exceptional, and therefore should be considered for listing in the National Register under Criterion C.

<sup>3</sup> This discussion which follows concerning the Colonial Revival property type is derived from a definition from Virginia & Lee McAlester's *A Field Guide to American Houses* (2000) chapter on "Eclectic Houses – Colonial Revival 1880-1955" pp. 321-341.

Potentially eligible examples of Colonial Revival architecture to the *National Register of Historic Places* should have integrity of location, setting, design, feeling, association, materials and workmanship, without significant unsympathetic twentieth or twenty-first century additions that obscure their original form and function. Porches may be screened in, but infilled porches or bays are usually unacceptable for eligibility. Earlier examples of Colonial Revival architecture should have a hipped roof, preferably with an intact, full-width front wood porch and four-square massing; later examples of this type should show more restrained features and a side-gable roof. It is anticipated that most Colonial Revival dwellings are either one and one-half stories, or two and one-half stories in height; eligible examples of the Colonial Revival building type should retain their original fenestration and positioning of doors if they do not have their original windows or doors. Properties that individually exhibit the above characteristics would be potentially eligible for consideration for the *National Register of Historic Places* under Criterion C: architectural significance/vernacular Colonial Revival style; or if part of an Agricultural Complex eligible for consideration under Criterion A: Baltimore Hundred agricultural trends/practices.

More intensive research is needed into the role of government and religion, as well as occupational organizations during the time of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880 – 1940 +/-.

#### **Suburbanization and Early Ex-Urbanization: 1940-1960 +/-**

Georgetown remained much the same as in the earlier period. During the first half of the century the commercial district ran from the circle east to the railroad, with a variety of businesses (Wade, p. 73). Georgetown served the farmers in the surrounding area, and they in turn, served the town. The shops provided supplies and the railroad provided a means to ship their goods to other areas of the state.

During the Post-World War II Era, construction of relatively small, modest one or one and one-half story houses occurred in the project area. These houses, which will collectively be typed as Minimal Traditional for the purposes of this context, were usually constructed between c.1940 through the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Since Minimal Traditional houses are a relatively recent property type (which drew upon a variety of architectural styles) little has been written about them in comparison to other property types discussed in this context. 820 Route 9 (S-10125) is an example of the Minimal Traditional style within the project area.

Unlike many Colonial Revival houses that preceded them, Minimal Traditional houses made little attempt to carefully copy Neoclassical or Colonial prototypes (McAlester, p. 475). Instead, Minimal Traditional houses borrowed “prominent historical details (for example, Tudor half-timbering, Georgian doorways, and Queen Anne spindlework porches) and freely adapt[ed] them to contemporary forms and materials” (McAlester, p.

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<sup>4</sup> The term “Minimal Traditional” and its definition architecturally is taken from Virginia & Lee McAlester’s text *A Field Guide to American Houses* (2000). See the chapter on “American Houses Since 1940,” pages 476-485 for illustrations of this property type. For the purposes of this report, only those Minimal Traditional Houses fifty (50) years of age or older were evaluated under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

475). This Post-War wave of housing of “historically based styles” has essentially remained the “dominant theme in American house design” into the late twentieth century (McAlester, p. 475).

Minimal Traditional houses frequently feature Tudor-inspired details and are one story or one and one-half story in height. Minimal Traditional houses usually feature a “dominant front gable and massive chimneys, but the steep Tudor roof pitch is lowered and the façade is simplified by omitting most of the traditional detailing” (McAlester, p. 477). “Eaves and rakes are close, rather than overhanging,” and have a shallow or intermediate pitched roofline with few details (McAlester, p. 478). In some examples of Minimal Traditional housing, large brick exterior chimneys are seen; most examples contain at least one front-facing projecting gable (McAlester, p. 478). Window styles varied; large single-pane or multi-pane picture windows are common, as are corner windows, and single and paired double-sash windows. Shutters are commonly applied to the exterior, and the front entry is emphasized in the design (Maxwell & Massey, p. 56). Roofs are usually clad in asphalt shingles; the exterior can feature a variety of finishes, including brick, brick veneer, wood shingles or clapboard, stone or stone veneer (McAlester, p. 478). Garages are sometimes integrated into house design; however, it is anticipated that the majority of Minimal Traditional houses along the Route 9/Road 319 APE will feature single or double detached vehicular garages.

In order to be considered a potentially eligible Minimal Traditional house for the *National Register of Historic Places*, a resource must be of exceptional integrity and significance, and be able to convey something new or significant to our understanding of tract housing, or perhaps the construction techniques of Minimal Traditional houses. If a particular house or group of houses is associated with a local or regional historically significant event, then the resource may be eligible for listing under Criterion A. If the Minimal Traditional house is associated with a particular individual or family of note, then the resource may be eligible for listing under Criterion B. A Minimal Traditional dwelling may be eligible under Criterion C if it represents the work of a master builder or architect; is a defining example locally or state-wide of Minimal Traditional form; represents a new or revolutionary building technique, local variation, or material; or exhibits high artistic values. It must have a high degree of integrity, original building materials, and landscaping features, all of which date to the Period of Significance, and other supporting materials such as architectural or subdivision plans, and be able to contribute something new to our understanding of Post-WWII buildings. A Minimal Traditional house may be eligible under Criterion D if it has the potential to yield, or has yielded, “information important in prehistory or history.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, a Minimal Traditional house constructed in the past fifty (50) years maybe be eligible under Criteria Consideration G if it has achieved significance within the last half century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See the National Register Bulletin: *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, pp. 12-24.

<sup>6</sup> See the National Register Bulletin: *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, pp. 41-43.