

Chapter 3 – Background Research and Historic Context

The DelDOT recommended APE contains approximately 11.8 acres and includes the New Castle County – Women’s Ward (PIN 0703720246), which has been previously surveyed (CRS No. N-13728) but has not been previously evaluated for the National Register. CRS update forms are included in the appendix of this document.

New Castle County has designated 34 Historic Zoning Districts throughout the county. These include individual buildings and historic districts and are subject to review by the county Historic Review Board. The DelDOT recommended APE does not include any designated Historic Zoning Districts.

Historic Context

In accordance with state guidelines, the historic context has been divided into chronological periods as first set forth in the *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). The historic themes of Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change, Architecture, Engineering and Decorative Arts, and Major Families, Individuals, and Events were identified through research as applicable to the resource found in the DelDOT recommended APE for the current project and are discussed in the historic context.

The project area is in the piedmont geographic zone as defined as defined by the *Delaware Comprehensive Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989). As the most northern of Delaware’s geographic zones, the Piedmont encompasses land north of the fall line separating this zone with the Coastal Plain that crosses the state in a generally northeast to southwest direction. A nearly-level-to-hilly topography composed of fertile clay soils well-suited for agricultural uses characterizes the Piedmont’s surface. Major land forms of the Piedmont include Iron Hill and Chestnut Hill, both located to the south, and Mount Cuba, to the west. Early European pioneers noted a rich variety of oak, hickory, poplar, walnut, and ash trees in the Piedmont region prior to extensive land clearing activities. The region’s major and minor creeks and streams, including the Red Clay Creek, flow and drain primarily southeastward into the Christina River, which flows northeast before entering the Delaware River at Wilmington (Ames et al. 1989, 32-34).

Settlement and agricultural development of the region quickened during the 18th Century. Despite heavy silting that denied navigation, the Piedmont’s watercourses provided power for mills and early manufacturing (Ames et al. 2006, 11). At first used primarily to power grist and saw mills, by the early 1800s the area’s streams powered a wide variety of manufacturing facilities, including a variety of mills: Paper, woolen, spice, powder, spice, powder, carding, and iron-rolling (Ames et al. 1989, 31). Partly in response to the mills’ demand for workers, nucleated settlements surrounding these early industrial centers developed.

Despite continued industrial growth along the Piedmont’s rural waterways, during much of the 19th century agriculture remained the predominant land use throughout the region.

As early as the early-nineteenth century, very little uncultivated, arable land remained in the Piedmont region of Delaware (Ames et al. 1989, 47-49). The innovation of improved transportation networks, such as turnpikes – including the Newport and Gap, PA Turnpike – and railroads, greatly assisted both farming and manufacturing activities, and linked the area into the larger, regional economy. Rail access provided farmers with more efficient methods of transporting surplus produce to distance markets, thereby boosting productivity and the cultivation of lucrative cash crops (Ames et al. 2006, 12-14). In addition to furnishing outlets for exploring finished goods, railroads also permitted mill and manufacturing centers a means to import new materials not available locally. The railroads also helped focus commercial activities and further settlement at villages and towns with rail stations (Ames et al. 1989, 49-51).

As Wilmington evolved into the state's largest population and manufacturing center during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of the Piedmont's manufacturing centers ceased operations (Ames et al. 1989, 85-90). Improved transportation systems, such as horse-drawn and, later, electric streetcars along with the rise of a wage-earning middle class helped lead to the development of former agricultural land in the immediate surrounding areas of Wilmington (Chase et al. 1992, 6-7). Eventually, advancements in automotive production technology made widespread use of the vehicles affordable. Correlating improvements to surrounding roadways by the State Highway Department provided connections to further hinterlands, thus both intensifying and distributing suburban development across northern New Castle County (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 1991, 180-189). Throughout most other areas of the Piedmont, the economy continued to rely on agricultural activity (Ames et al. 1989, 51).

Since the end of World War II, the Piedmont has experienced continued suburban growth and development. Much of the region's former agricultural land became the locus for tract housing and other pre-fabricated development. Associated development of strip malls, big-box chain stores and regional shopping malls designed to accommodate the commercial needs of area residents unwilling to travel further distances have also encumbered large areas of former farmland. Business parks and research laboratories have additionally evolved or relocated to urban and suburban areas, further impacting the Piedmont landscape.

Background Context

Early Industrialization (1770-1830 +/-)

The earliest settlement in the Delaware Piedmont took place during the Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730 +/-) and Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770 +/-) periods. The land around the central Red Clay Creek was patented in October 1677 by John Anderson (Troy and Wood (Larrivee) Section 8, Page 1) before changing hands a variety of times during the eighteenth century. Milling began in the vicinity during the late seventeenth century and intensified during the mid-eighteenth century. Robert Philips, who bought land on the Red Clay Creek at what is now Greenbank, was the first documented miller at Greenbank (Ibid.). Philips operated a log mill through 1790, when he constructed a new frame building, which remains standing (Ibid.). This mill

implemented technological advancements developed by Newport native Oliver Evans (Ibid.). In 1812, Philips constructed a second mill building constructed of stone. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century milling activities transformed from commercial grain milling to wool and later the manufacture of carriage parts (Ibid.).

Even with the presence of the mill, the landscape surrounding this corridor of the Red Clay Creek was overwhelmingly engaged for agricultural pursuits. The largest change affecting the area came during the nineteenth century transportation revolution. Narrow, low capacity, dirt roads had been present around Greenbank (primarily leading to and from the mill) since the eighteenth century. Greenbank Road appears on Henry Heald's *Roads of New Castle County Surveyed and Printed* in 1820, Delaware's earliest road survey. The road connected the public road to Newport with the mill at Greenbank. In 1809, the Newport and Gap Tavern, PA turnpike was chartered. The improved road connected the Red Clay Creek milling area with the Philadelphia-Lancaster Turnpike, the nation's first. Four and a half miles of improved road were constructed by 1813 and the road was completed by 1818 (Thompson 11). It was the first successful turnpike company in Delaware.

Turnpike roads provided direct routes between ports and towns, often with hard, macadam – mixed stone dust and water – or plank surfaces that were well maintained (Ames et al. 2006, 10). Private corporations were organized to construct, maintain, and collect tolls along the road. In Delaware, the organization and membership of each company was controlled by the General Assembly P.A.C. (Spero & Co. 172). Turnpike companies sold stock, luring which offered the promise of dividends. Tolls were collected at gated intersections accompanied by small toll houses. Government controls were ever-present: turnpikes were required to be licensed before fares could be collected and fines could be levied for improper operating tactics or lax maintenance (P.A.C. Spero & Co. 172).

Industrialization and Early Urbanization (1830-1880 +/-)

During the mid-nineteenth century, the Piedmont was distinguished by an expansion of industrial manufacturing and the establishment of transportation networks (Ames et al. 1989, 51). Even as these networks grew, the majority of the landscape remained agricultural. Mills grew and prospered in relationship to the expansion of the turnpike and development of railroad networks. Railroads, however, served the larger mills located on the Brandywine Creek north of Wilmington decades before they entered the Red Clay Creek Valley (Thompson 18).

Just north of the project area the Brandywine Springs Hotel a water cure and resort opened in 1827. In 1833 the establishment was purchased by Matthew Newkirk, a Philadelphia entrepreneur and president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad. Newkirk expanded the hotel and invested heavily in the resort, advertising the healthful benefits of the iron-rich waters. Despite being elevated to a regional destination, the resort was not a financial success. After decades of ownership, Newkirk sold the property to the Fell family, who operated a spice mill on the Red Clay Creek further to the north (Ibid. 16).

As the nineteenth century progressed, the industrialists of the Red Clay Creek banded together to establish a railroad to serve their interests. The Wilmington and Western Railroad was chartered in 1867 and after a debate over routes along the Red Clay Creek or White Clay Creek – the former was chosen – began operations on October 19, 1872 (Ibid. 18). William Philips and Edward Mendenhall, owners of the Greenbank Mill and Marshallton Ironworks, were on the first board of directors of the railroad (Ibid). The railroad served to transport goods from farms, water powered mills, and small villages. The railroad reorganized just ten years into its existence and in 1877 became the Delaware Western Railroad before being folded into the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad during the 1880s.

An 1882 town directory listed the population of Faulkland, the town nearest to Greenbank, at 200 (Ibid. 20). According to the directory, approximately 30 farmers dotted the landscape around Greenbank and Fell Mills. Thus, even with the presence of the railroad, the landscape remained overwhelmingly rural.

Urbanization and Early Suburbanization (1880-1940 +/-)

In 1886, Richard W. Crook and his father-in-law James Megratten purchased the Brandywine Springs Hotel (Ibid. 22). Under their direction, the resort was transformed into a new American phenomenon called the amusement park. The park featured a toboggan slide, a carousel, an outdoor theater and other attractions (Ibid. 23). As Wilmington became a regional industrial production center, employment expanded. As a result, families had a greater amount of disposable income. Crook and Megratten sought to draw families and their money to Brandywine Springs. Shortly after opening the park, a Crook competitor opened the Wilmington and Elsmere Electric Railway connecting the park to Wilmington (Ibid. 25). In 1898, Crook invested in his own Wilmington and Brandywine Springs trolley line, which was only able to operate to the Wilmington city limits (Ibid. 26). Two years later Crook began operating the Peoples Railway, a trolley permitted to operate within the city. The venture continued through 1915, when both the trolley line and amusement park were sold (Ibid.).

The expansion of railroads and trolley lines into the Red Clay Creek Valley were accompanied by inevitable changes in land use. Slowly land was purchased for development by real estate investors. The growth in employment and population in Wilmington and presence of modern and improved transportation routes allowed a segment of workers to commute to their jobs. Northwest of the project area, The Cedars Land and Improvement Company formed in 1900 with Brandywine Springs Hotel proprietor Richard W. Crook as president (Dixon, Powell, Herman and Siders 76). Eighty-five acres along Newport Gap Pike were subdivided into 229 lots. Between 1903 and 1913 there were approximately 68 land transactions (New Castle County Recorder of Deeds 1901-1914). In the manner of many early suburbs, the lots were sold independently of homes, which were constructed by builders or other general contractors.

Amidst suburban development, light industrial milling, and established transportation corridors, a new type of development was taking place. In 1899 the Delaware Legislature

created the Board of Trustees of the New Castle County Workhouse and authorized the organization to oversee the construction of a new prison in New Castle County (Dixon, Powell, Herman and Siders 34). Composed of five New Castle County residents, the Board of Trustees purchased two lots totaling 38.25 acres on the south side of Greenbank Road, east of the Red Clay Creek. The parcels were 37.25 acres of farmland from Ann G. Flinn and one acre from the Wilmington and Brandywine Springs Railway (New Castle County Recorder of Deeds B-18-247; F-18-56).

The New Castle County Levy Court issued bonds to finance the construction of the new workhouse, finished in 1901 (Thompson 34). The brick structure was built to house 200 to 225 prisoners and included two cell blocks, a power plant, heating unit, workshop, quarry, dining room, laundry, whipping post and pillory (Ibid.). A specially designed car and railroad siding aided in the transport of prisoners (Ibid.). The Board of Trustees was required to take all prisoners sentenced by any New Castle County Court as well as those sent to the workhouse by courts in Kent and Sussex Counties. For the first 28 years of its existence, both men and women were housed in the New Castle County Workhouse. This arrangement created problems with segregation, safety, and overcrowding (Hamilton not paginated).

After nearly a decade of lobbying by the Prisoners Aid Society, the Board of Trustees utilized \$50,000 in appropriations from the New Castle County Levy Court to erect a women's prison in 1929 (Caldwell 150). Reportedly built with prison labor, the fifty-foot by seventy-foot, three-story, brick building was constructed on the grounds of the workhouse (Ibid. 163). The new building featured store rooms, a laundry, classroom, built-in isolation cell, boiler room, bathing facilities, fourteen bed rooms, an open dormitory, and ten double-bunk cells. The prison opened October 19, 1929 and maintained an average population of 32 women during its first year (Ibid.). The women's quarters in the workhouse was remodeled to house 100 men. The two facilities operated independently under the county-organized Board of Trustees through 1956, when the responsibility was transferred to the newly organized State Department of Corrections.

Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization (1940-1962±)

In 1938, the State Highway Department acquired right of way in advance of constructing Robert W. Kirkwood Highway, a fourteen-mile, divided median highway connecting Wilmington and Newark. The road was a major effort to create a swift, modern transportation corridor between the two cities. One of the major effects of the project was hastened suburban development and the introduction of new land uses to previously agricultural areas. Cranston Heights residential neighborhood and the Price's Corner shopping center are just two examples of development specifically associated with Kirkwood Highway.

On July 1, 1956 the Board of Trustees of the New Castle County Workhouse sold the prison buildings and grounds to the newly formed State Board of Corrections for \$1 (NCC Recorder of Deeds C-57-309). The State Board of Corrections was given the responsibility for the care, supervision and administration of all prisons, facilities and prisoners. Within twenty years, due in part to the age of the structure and the need for a

larger, more modern facility, ownership of the workhouse was transferred back to New Castle County on September 1, 1973 (NCC Recorder of Deeds Z-95-157). The transaction took place with the condition that all buildings be razed and the land converted to parkland. The women's prison was remodeled and continued to function within the Department of Corrections. In 1975 it became the Pre-Trial Annex of the Delaware Corrections Center in Smyrna, housing inmates awaiting trial (State of Delaware Department of Corrections). The facility became independent during administrative restructuring in 1978. On December 9, 1994 the facility was renamed the John L. Webb Correctional Facility in honor of the first African American Correctional Officer and the first African American male warden in Delaware (State of Delaware Department of Corrections). Today the facility houses Level IV male inmates including all incarcerated DUI offenders in Delaware.

A plat plan for Albertson Park Subdivision, directly across Greenbank road from the correctional facility, was filed with New Castle County Recorder of Deeds on June 20, 1959. Al-Ru Development Company of Oakmont Hills in Wilmington planned to construct 161 houses between Centerville Road and the Red Clay Creek. The first houses were built between 1959 and 1961, though the subdivision was not finished for several more years. Shortly after the introduction of houses, Greenbank apartments, the AMF bowling alley and several strip shopping centers were constructed along Greenbank Road.

The suburbanization of the landscape corresponded to the decline of the importance of agriculture to the local economy. Although the Greenbank Mill continued to operate as a custom mill from 1925 through the 1960s under the stewardship of Roy Magargal. In 1969, shortly after it was purchased by Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc., the mill was severely damaged by an arsonist's fire (Greenbank Mill Associates). The c. 1790 stone building was destroyed and the frame mill structure sustained heavy damage. After several years of fundraising and struggling to save the mill, Greenbank Mill Associates incorporated in 1987 and set about renovating the mill with an adaptive reuse approach advocated by *Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. After careful restoration and thousands of volunteer hours, the mill museum opened for demonstration purposes in the fall of 2004.

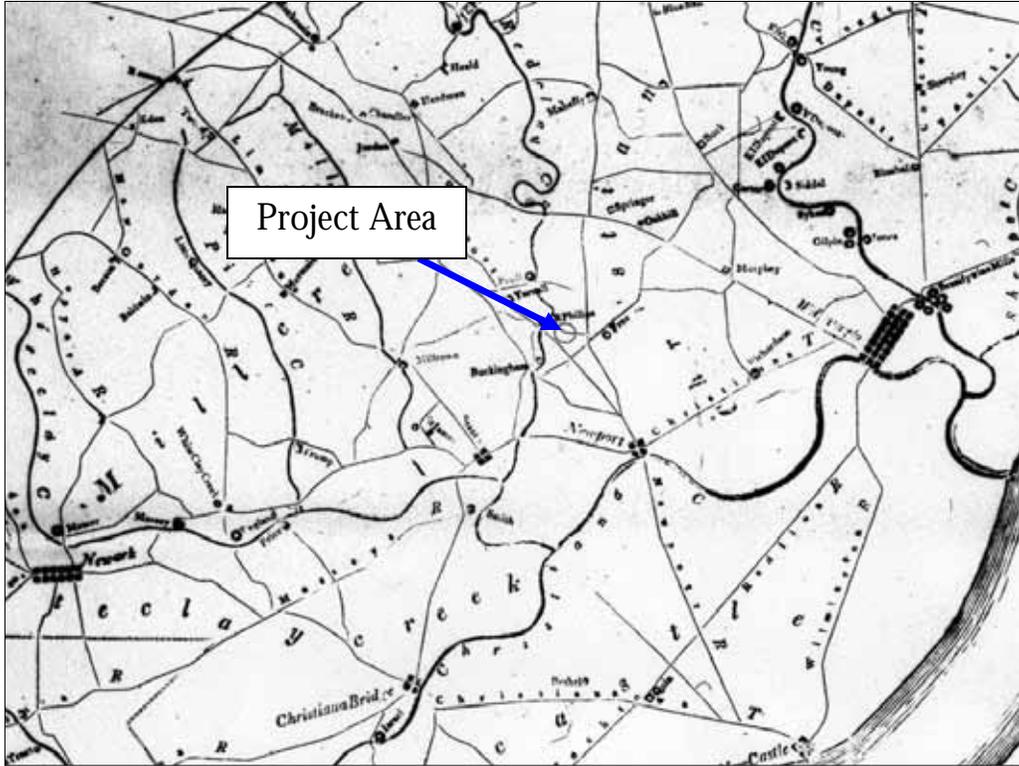


Figure 3-1: Henry Heald Roads of New Castle County Surveyed and Printed, 1820



Figure 3-2: Samuel M. Rea and Jacob Price, Map of New Castle County, Delaware, 1849

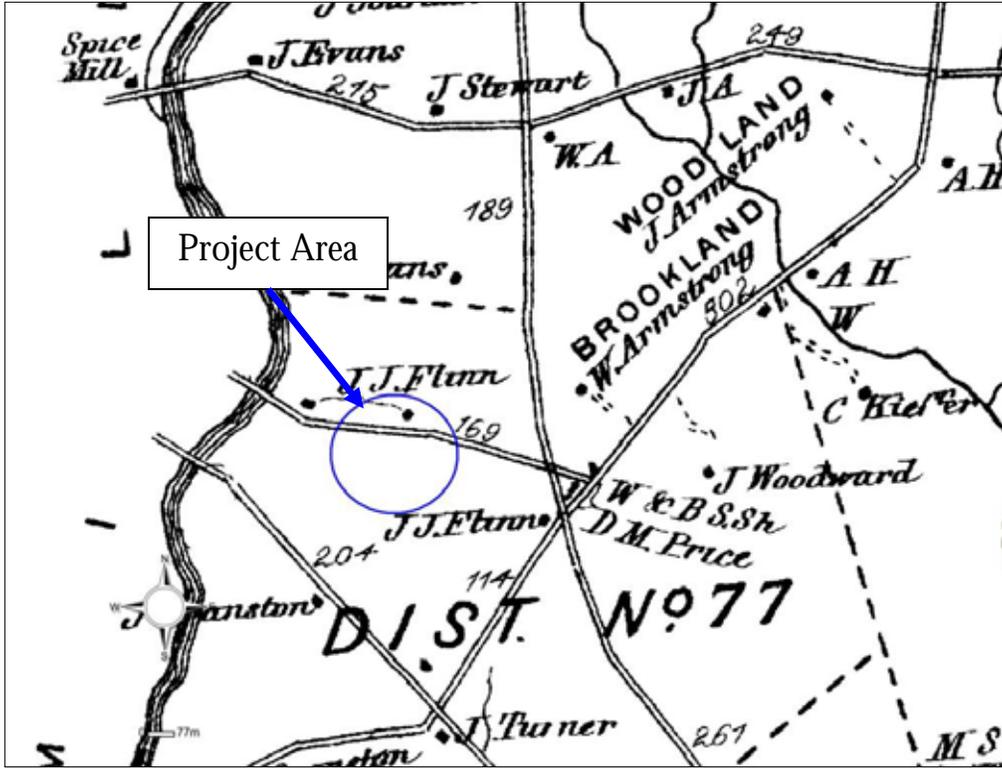


Figure 3-3: J.G. Beers, *Atlas of Delaware*, 1868

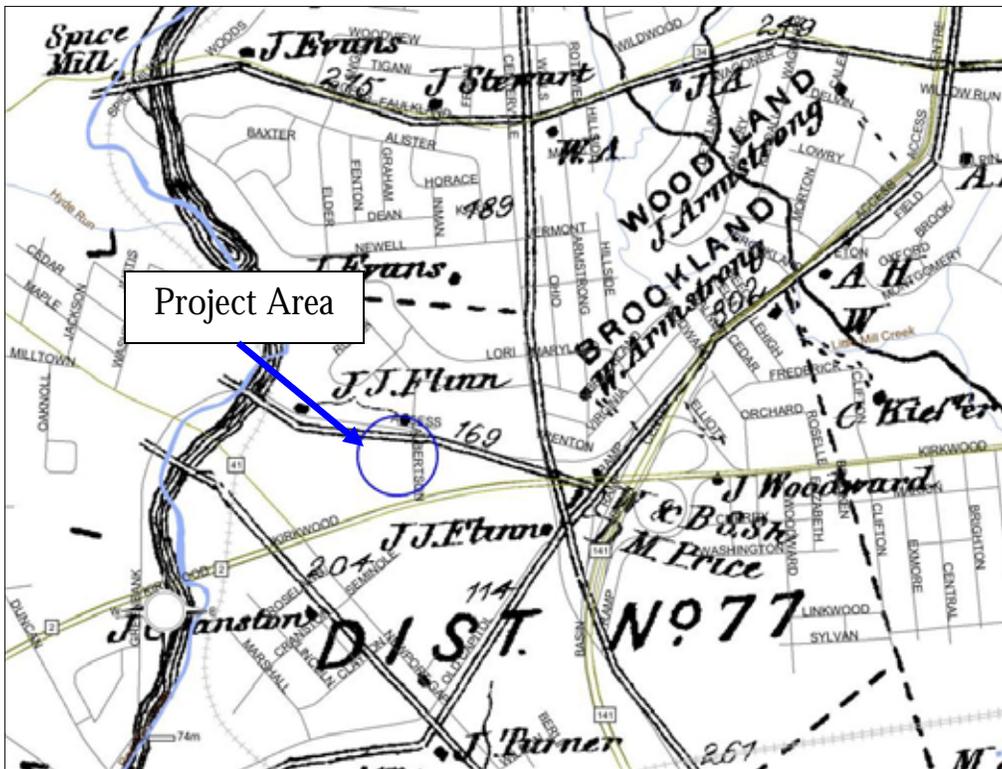


Figure 3-4: J.G. Beers, *Atlas of Delaware*, 1868 with an overlay of the modern street grid

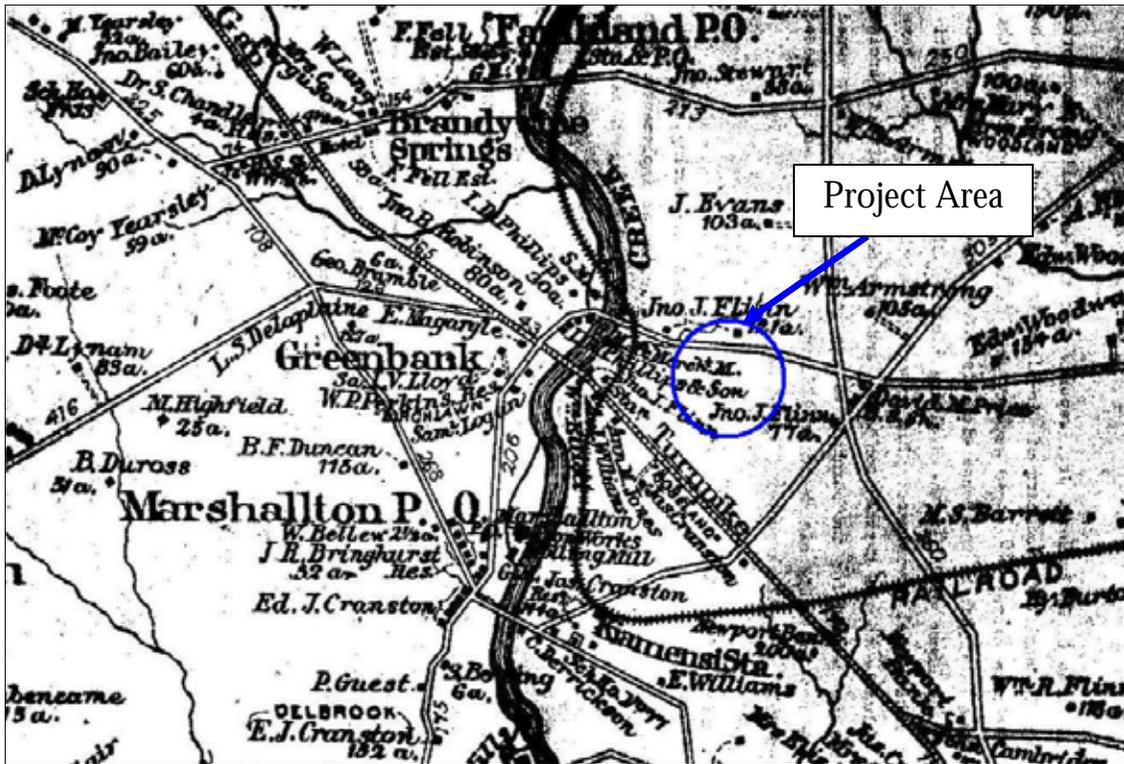


Figure 3-5: Hopkins, *Map of New Castle County, Delaware*. 1881

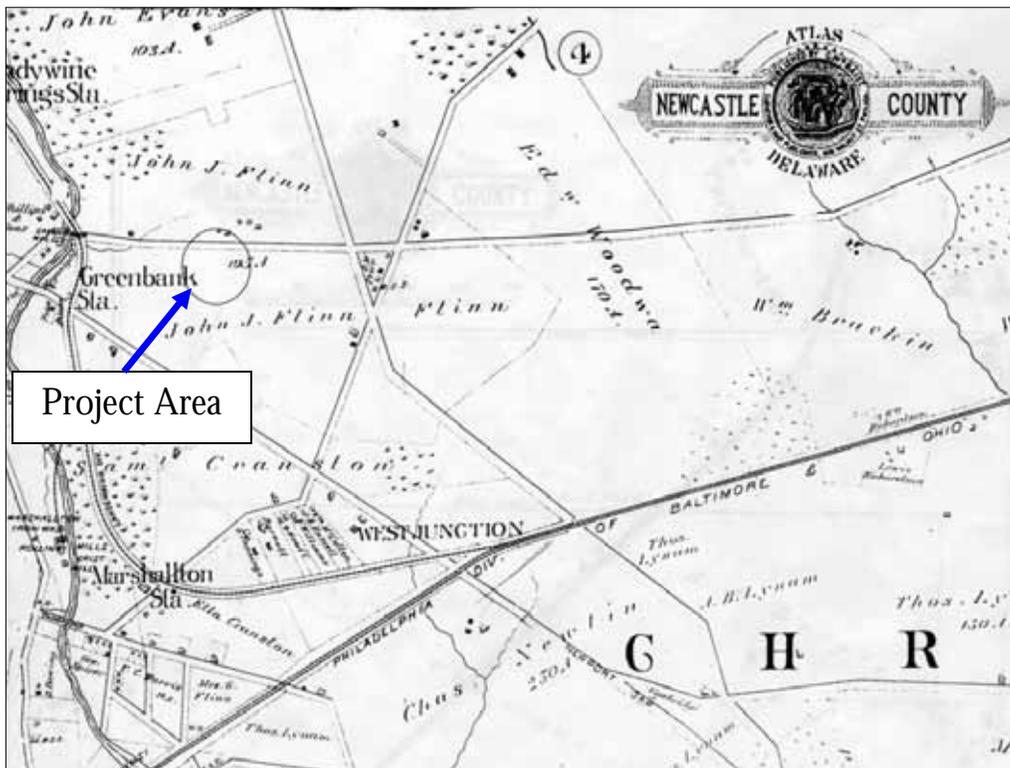


Figure 3-6: William Baist, *Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware*, 1893

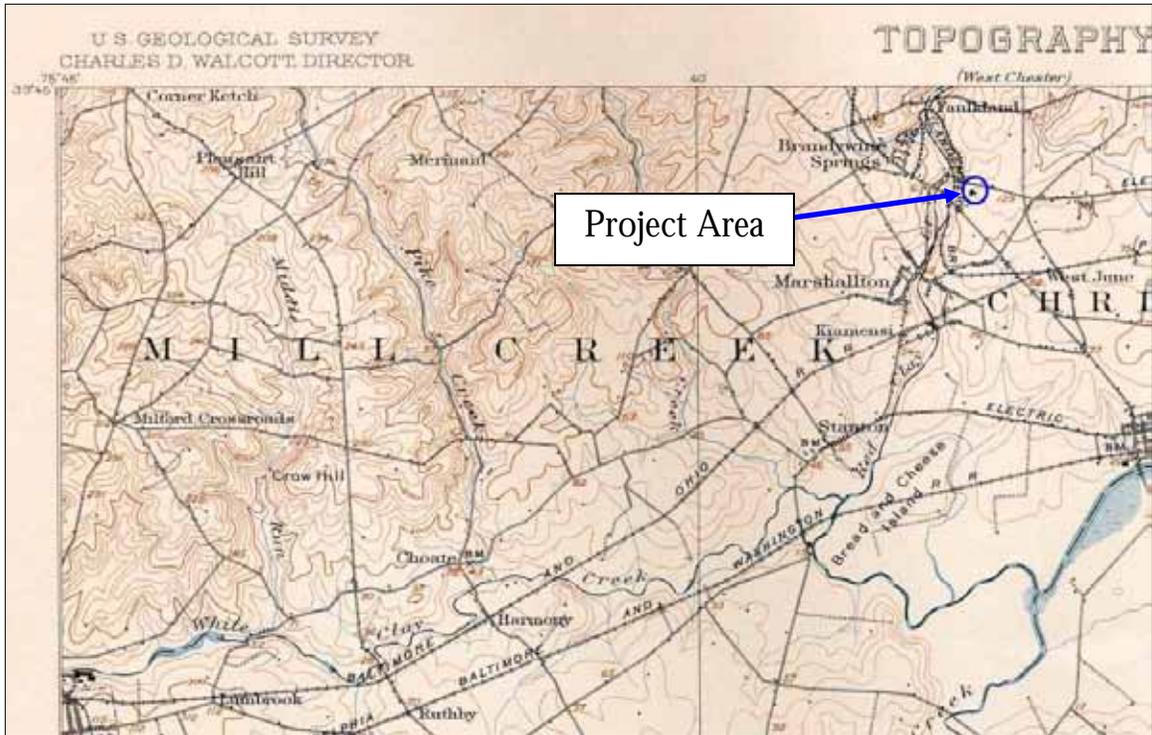


Figure 3-7: 1906 U.S.G.S. 15' Quadrangle: Wilmington Northwest, DE

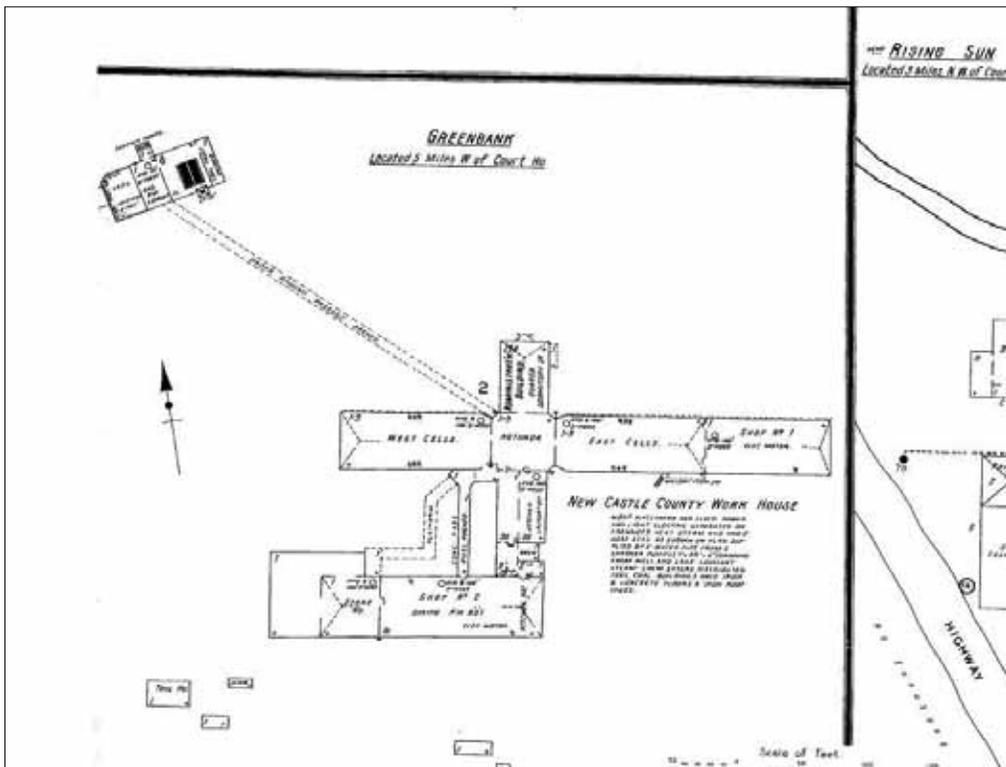


Figure 3-8: Plate 247 of the 1927 Sanborn-Ferris Fire Insurance Map of Wilmington, showing the New Castle County Workhouse just prior to the construction of the women's prison.

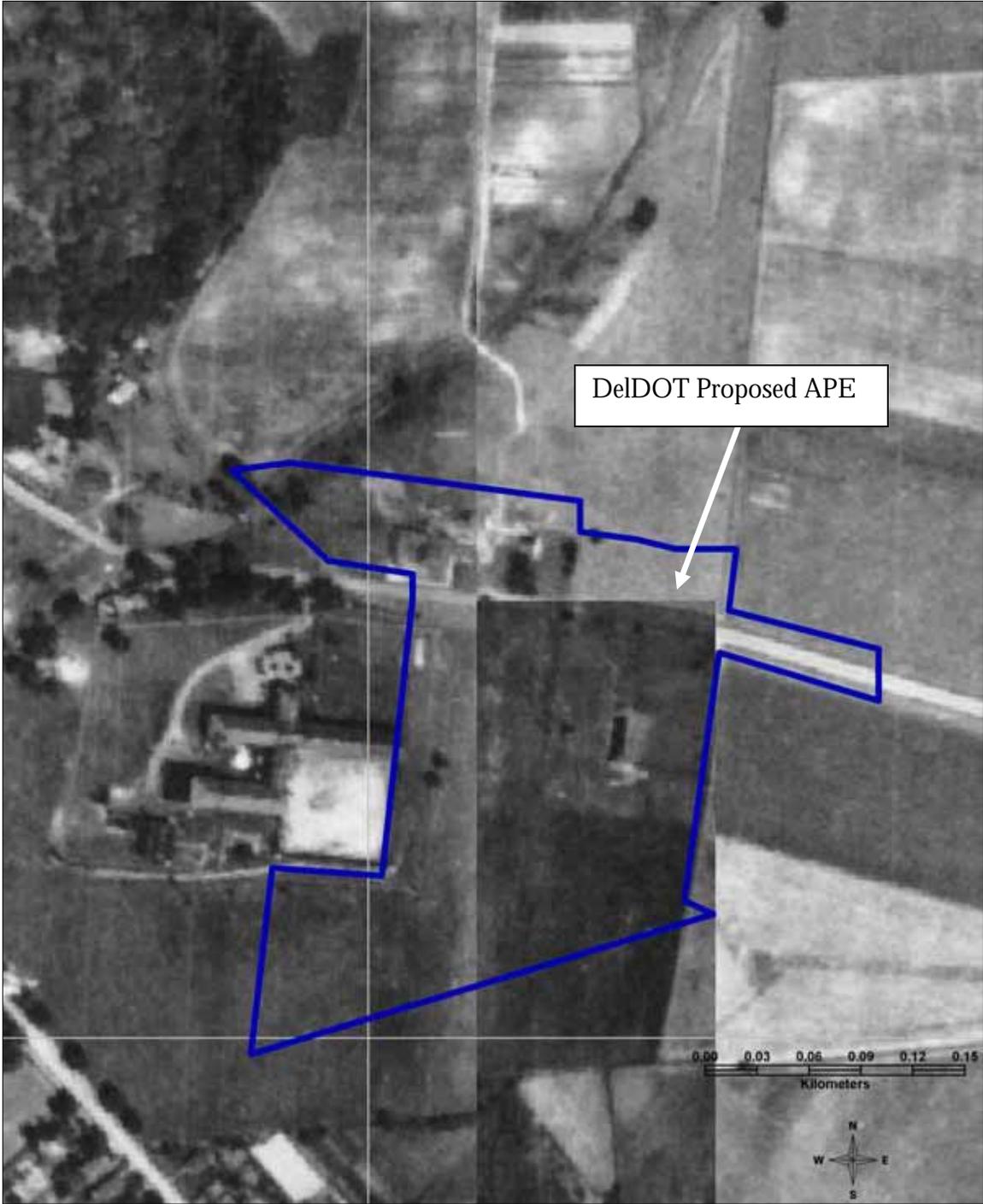


Figure 3-9: 1937 Aerial Photograph (Geomedia)

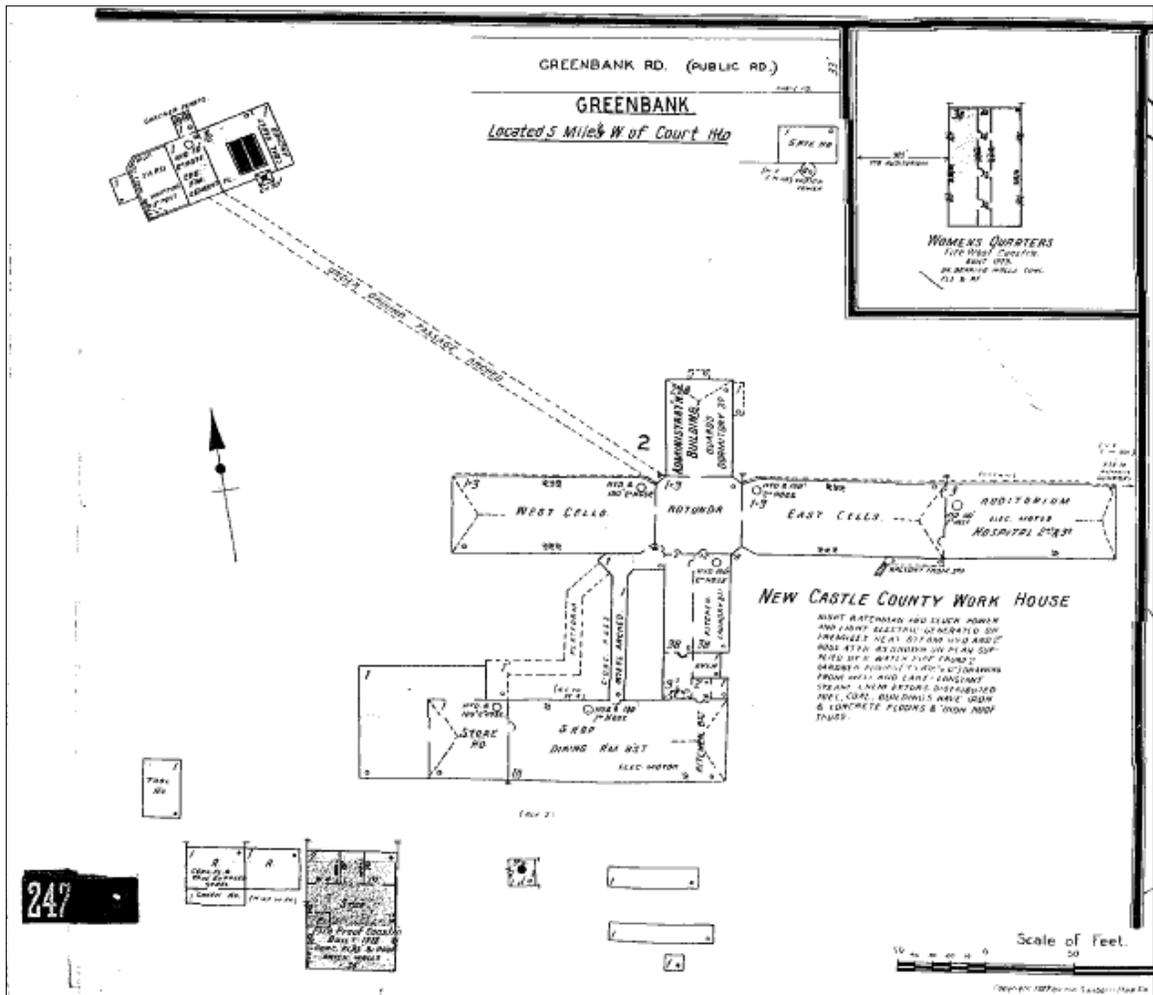


Figure 3-10: : A detail of plate 247 of the 1951 Sanborn-Ferris Fire Insurance Map of Wilmington, showing the New Castle County Workhouse with an inset depicting the women's prison.

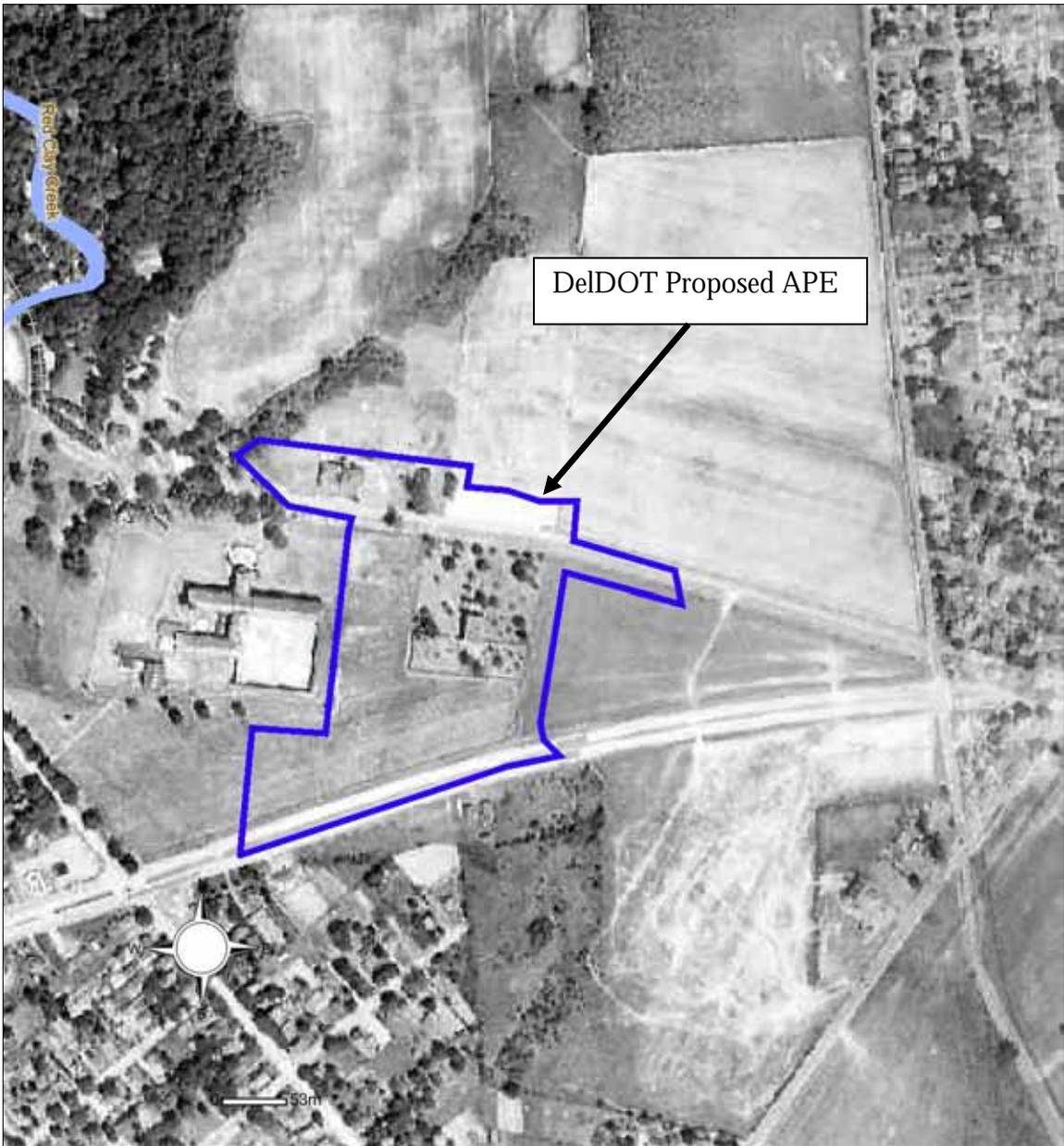


Figure 3-11: 1954 Aerial Photograph (Delaware CHRIS)

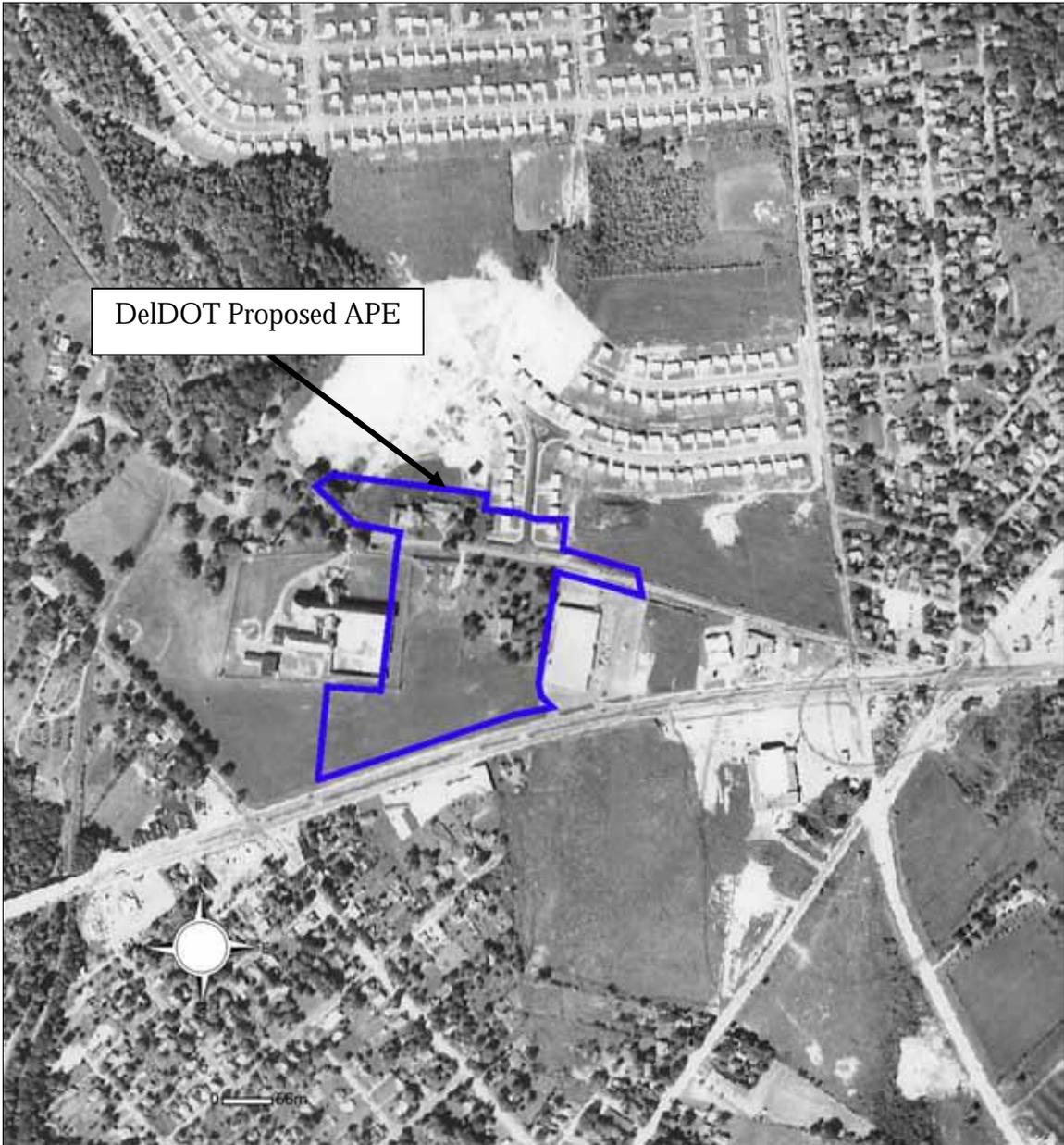


Figure 3-12: 1961 Aerial Photograph (Delaware CHRIS)

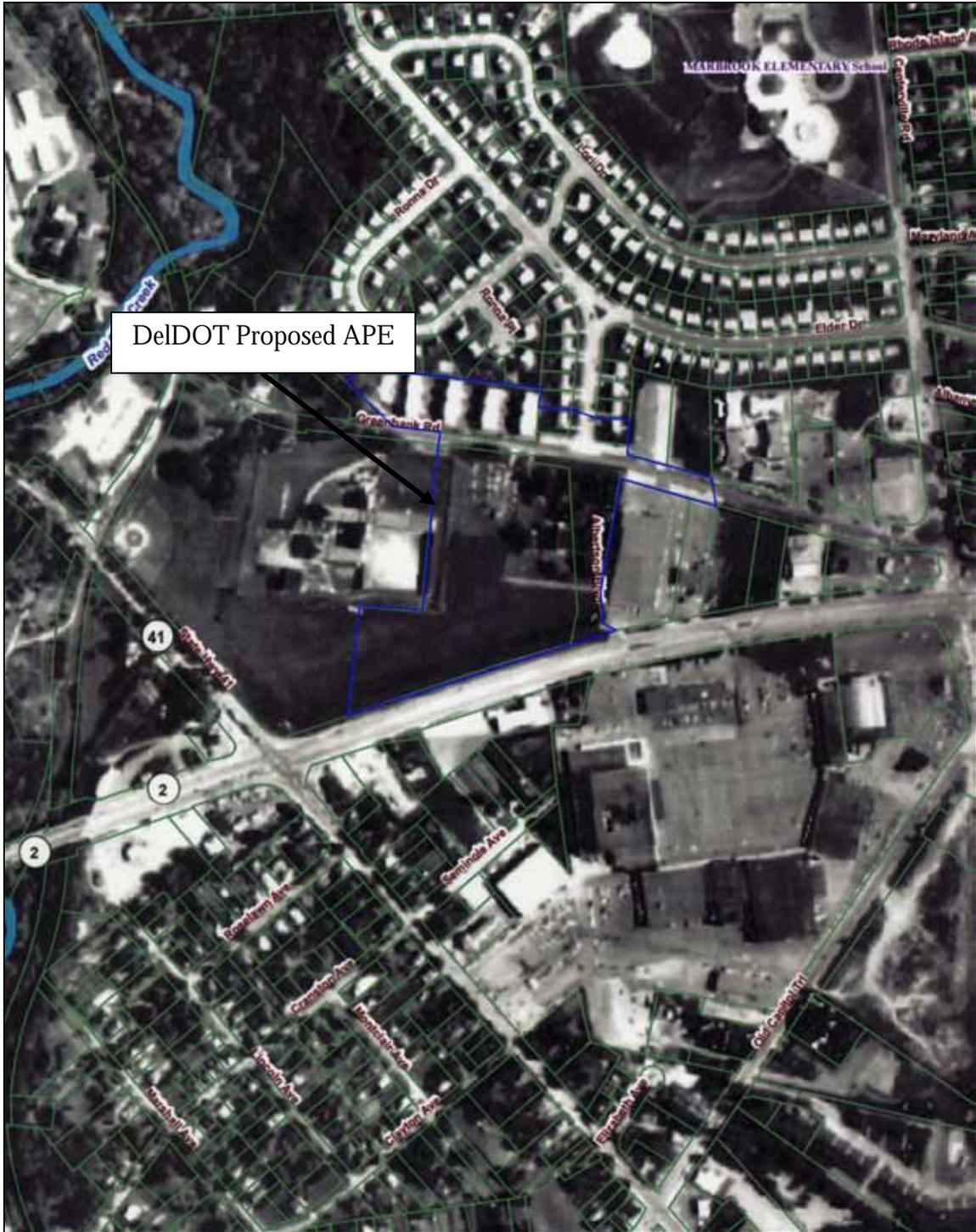


Figure 2-13: 1968 Aerial photograph of the project area. Note the construction of Greenbank Apartments directly north of the New Castle County Workhouse – Women’s Ward. The J.J. Flinn house was demolished to make way for the new complex. (Delaware DataMIL)