

4.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW



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4.1 Geographic Setting

The proposed SR 1 Frederica Interchange project study area is located within the Mid-Drainage zone of the Lower Coastal Plain Physiographic Province. The project study area predominantly consists of agricultural lands overlooking the estuary setting of the Murderkill River (Figure 2). Gently rolling plowed fields are found on the east side of SR 1, as well as in the small area of land situated between SR 1 and SR 12. A small grove of ornamental trees and plants clustered along the east side of SR 1, at the intersection of SR 1 and SR 12, represents the location of the non-extant Soulie Gray House (K-835). On the west side of SR 1, a large tract of agricultural land extends west to the Murderkill River (Photograph 1). Marshlands border the southern limits of the area, with a small drainage extending along the western edge of SR 12 to the intersection of SR 12 and SR 1. A modern bridge spans Spring Creek at the intersection of SR 12 and SR 1 (Photograph 2). A farm pond found on the east side of SR 1 feeds this drainage. Generally, the land slopes from the north down to the south. A mix of deciduous and coniferous trees interspersed with scrub/shrub and briars are found along the transition zone between agricultural field and marshland. Grassy banks line the edge of the roadway.

4.2 Regional Historic Setting

The post-contact history of the Middle Atlantic region begins with the explorations of numerous European peoples in North America. In general, the history of Delaware is divided into five time periods, beginning with exploration of the area and concluding with modern urbanization (De Cunzo and Catts 1990). The first two time periods, Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730), and Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770), pre-date the standing architectural resources in the project area; consequently, these periods are not addressed in this report. However, they will be discussed in the forthcoming archaeological report for the proposed SR 1 Frederica Interchange project.

4.2.1 Transformation from Colony to State (1770-1830)

Early Swedish settlers quickly recognized the value of the rich soil and favorable climate that the Delaware region offered. The Swedes cultivated tobacco, corn, pumpkins, rye, barley, watermelons, and wild turnips among other crops (Hoffecker 1977:18). By the eighteenth



Photograph 1: Overview of SR 1 project area; SR 1 in foreground; Wix/Robbins Property in background. Garage/shed is on the left of the photo. View to west (April 2004).



Photograph 2: View of modern bridge over SR 12, looking northeast over Spring Creek (April 2004).

century, Delaware, along with the rest of the middle colonies, emerged as the “bread colonies” of the New World (Schlebecker 1975:40).

Frederica. One of the earliest established communities in South Murderkill Hundred, Kent County, is the town of Frederica. It is laid out on the part of “St. Collom” that was originally warranted to Benoni Bishop in 1681 as a tract of 1400 acres. It was originally known as “Johnny Cake Landing” and “Indian Point” (Conrad 1908:664-5). The small ship landing gradually grew into a shipbuilding center and homeport for vessels engaged in both coastal and international trade. The town was first surveyed and laid out in lots by John Emerson in 1772. The town was incorporated by the legislature in 1826; however, that charter was repealed, then reissued in 1865 (Bevan 1929:848). In 1736, the first ship to have been built and launched on the Murderkill was the *Hopewell*, a ten-ton sloop. The construction of Schooner-style ships began in the mid-eighteenth century; and ship-building prospered in Frederica until around 1887 (Bevan 1929:848).

The Revolutionary War and Farming. The American Revolution brought much disarray to the region at the beginning of this time period. British activities on the Delaware River and Bay disrupted the maritime economy of the area, impacting all manner of trade. British, French, and Continental forces passing through Delaware made for disruptive travel to farmer and merchant alike. Social and political unrest in the colony further heightened an already tense atmosphere.

Colonists witnessed a variety of military forces pass through Delaware during the Revolutionary War. British and Hessian troops marched from Cecil County, Maryland and skirmished in the fall of 1777 with American forces at Cooch’s Bridge, south of Newark. The American forces were forced to retreat, and the British seized Wilmington. The control of Wilmington shifted frequently throughout the winter of 1777/1778. In 1781, Lafayette’s French troops disembarked at Christiana, then proceeded to march west towards Tidewater, Virginia.

After the Revolutionary War, the population of Delaware grew rapidly, while its agricultural productivity dropped. The population of Kent County was estimated at 18,920 in 1790 (Munroe 1993). A decrease in soil fertility coupled with competition for good farming land and a decline

in wheat prices forced many farmers with small operations to sell off their holdings to larger, wealthier farms. A shift in rural settlement patterns was observed as farms began to move from the older coastal settlements to the upland areas in the middle of the state. Factors such as an improvement in agricultural technology and crop rotation allowed for greater crop yields in these upland fields.

Barratt's Chapel. Located in the southern half of Kent County, just to the north of the town of Frederica, Barratt's Chapel was built in 1780. It was built on land donated by Philip Barratt, a prominent political figure in the county. Barratt, who had recently become a Methodist, wanted to build a center for the growing Methodist movement in Delaware. Barratt's Chapel is the oldest surviving church building in the United States built by and for Methodists and is known as the "Cradle of Methodism." Methodism began in England as a movement within the Church of England led by John and Charles Wesley. As members of the Methodist Societies emigrated to the American colonies, Methodism began to increase its following in the Colonies. Between 1768 and 1774, John Wesley sent Francis Asbury and seven other Methodist lay preachers from England to minister to the growing societies. When the Revolutionary War broke out, only Asbury and James Dempster chose to remain in America. Dempster withdrew to upstate New York, where he remained for the rest of his life; thus Asbury became the effective leader of American Methodists (<http://www.barrattschapel.org/bachSTOa1.aspx>, accessed 10 November 2003).

Agriculture continued to be important throughout the eighteenth century and into the early decades of the nineteenth century. Many dispossessed farmers left Delaware during the 1820s and 1830s, or sought occupation in the numerous urban and industrial centers where employment was readily available. Manufacturing and commerce prospered under the influence of an increased labor force. Textile manufacturers in the cotton and woolen mills along Red Clay Creek, White Clay Creek, and Brandywine Creek produced the finished raw fabrics needed to clothe a growing country (Pursell 1958). In 1825, fur and silk hats manufactured by Lewis and Thomas Lockwood in Frederica provided jobs and income for residents in the community (Coverdale 1976: 13).

4.2.2 Industrialization and Capitalization (1830-1880)

The effects of the Industrial Revolution led to significant advances in transportation, urbanization, and industrialization in northern Delaware. By the early 1830s, a significant number of transportation improvements were underway. The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, finished in 1829, opened a direct route from the head of the Chesapeake Bay to the Delaware River, eliminating the long water journey around the Delmarva Peninsula. The shortened travel time fostered more business between the major urban centers of Baltimore and Philadelphia. In 1837, 100,000.0 tons of cargo passed through the C & D Canal, while in 1872, the peak tonnage year, 1,318,772.0 tons were transported (Snyder and Guss 1974). The towns of St. Georges and Delaware City grew rapidly and became social and economic points for the local community as a result of the commercial traffic with the canal.

On the eve of the Civil War, the cash value of farms in Delaware totaled nearly \$31.5 million dollars. During the same year, the entire value of manufactures in Delaware totaled approximately \$9.9 million (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998; approximately \$680 million and \$215 million, respectively, in 2004 dollars). These statistics, however, belie the differences that existed within the state between New Castle County in the north, and Kent and Sussex counties in the south. Northern portions of the state quickly became industrialized and economically progressive, while the southern portions remained agricultural. In many respects, the State of Delaware, during the antebellum period, reflected larger sectional differences that existed between north and south. New Castle County accounted for over 90 percent of the total value of manufacturing products in Delaware. The value of manufacturing products for Kent and Sussex counties combined totaled less than \$1 million (approximately \$20 million in 2004 dollars). New Castle also boasted of greater agricultural output than the two southern counties combined. This production reflected the transportation and technological advantages that New Castle County enjoyed during the nineteenth century.

Builders completed the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal in New Castle County by 1830, and by the late 1850s, tonnage on this route exceeded the half-million mark (Taylor 1951:41-42). The canal, along with the completion of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad (PW

& BRR) in 1838, provided the necessary transportation linkages with major markets and assured the economic success of the City of Wilmington and New Castle County (ibid: 78).

Kent County, however, did not enjoy the same transportation advantages. As a result, Kent's economy and population remained static for most of the nineteenth century. During the period from 1790 to 1850, the population of Kent County increased from 18,920 to 22,816, an increase of only 21 percent. During the same period, the population of New Castle County increased 117 percent from 19,688 to 42,780 (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998). As New Castle County prospered during the first half of the nineteenth century, Kent County suffered from economic stagnation. Intense farming of the land, coupled with a lack of soils conservation, completely exhausted the soil in the southern parts of the state by 1850. Wheat yield per acre in Kent County fell to five bushels (Hoffecker 1977: 44).

New Castle County, despite having nearly 15,000.0 fewer acres and over 250 fewer farms than Kent County, boasted of a cash value of all farms of nearly \$17 million in 1860. This figure amounted to almost \$8 million more than the value of Kent County farms (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998). New Castle County more than doubled Kent's output of wheat, and more than quadrupled its output of rye and oats. New Castle also exceeded the amount of butter and cheese Kent produced by 580,000 pounds (New Castle produced 769,915 pounds, Kent produced 189,091 pounds), and surpassed the hay tonnage by 20,000 tons (New Castle produced 24,417 tons; Kent produced 4,109 tons; DeBow 1854:208-209). In addition to its transportation advantages, New Castle County boasted of a progressive farming population. New Castle farmers formed the "Agricultural Society of the County of New Castle" in 1819. This organization sought to help county farmers improve agricultural production and efficiency. The Society provided a forum for the dissemination of modern farming practices including crop rotation, use of labor-saving machinery, and labor management (Herman 1987:117). Many New Castle farmers also introduced new animals, such as merino sheep herds, and experimented with new crops (Hoffecker 1977: 47). Their progressive thinking, cooperative spirit, and use of new technologies ensured that New Castle County sustained a profitable agricultural economy throughout the nineteenth century.

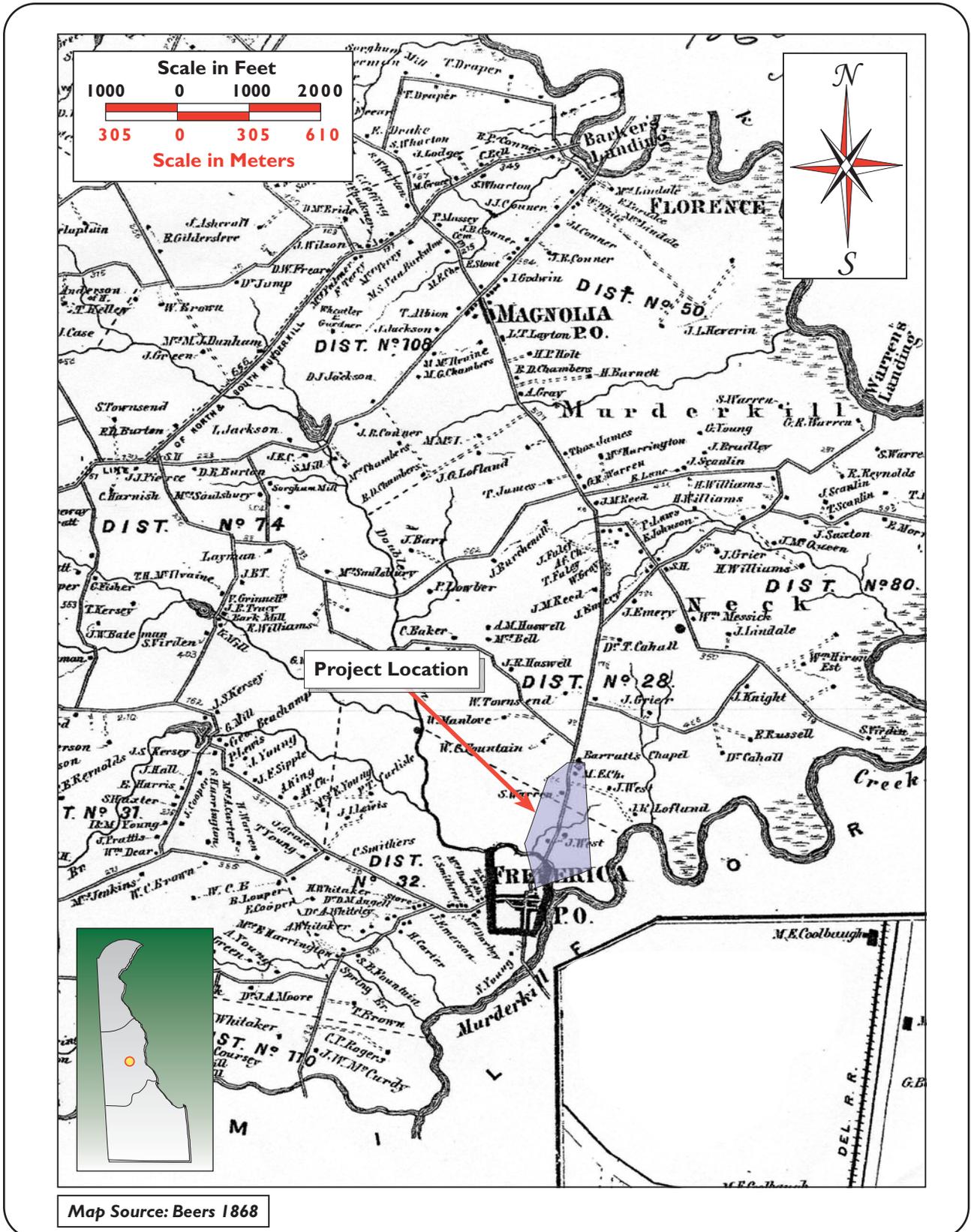
The Port of Frederica. The Port of Frederica continued to expand as a shipbuilding center during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, utilizing local white oak and pine. The first steamboat to navigate the Murderkill to Frederica was the “Egypt Mills” in 1857 (Scharf 1888:1160). This riverside town on the Murderkill River is clearly depicted on the 1868 Beers’s Atlas of Delaware (Figure 3).

Prior to the coming of the railroad in the late 1850s, Frederica was a busy shipping port (Bevan 1929:848). The construction of the Delaware Railroad created an efficient means of overland transportation through the inland portion of the state, and served to divert shipping away from coastal routes. Canneries and other industries soon began in the town, and Frederica today has retained much of its character-defining qualities as a nineteenth-century commercial town.

Transportation Improvements and the Rise of the Peach in Kent County. Two mid-nineteenth-century developments changed the fortunes of the southern portion of Delaware. The first was the extension of the PW & BRR to southern portions of the state. As early as the 1830s, elected officials and financiers envisioned a rail line that would link Wilmington with the southern half of the state. However, periodic downturns in the economy stalled the project for years. Not until the PW & BRR supported the project did the idea become reality. The Delaware line finally opened late in 1856, with the southern terminus located at Seaford and the northern terminus linked with major rail networks at Wilmington (Hoffecker 1977: 46).

The second development that aided the economic growth of southern Delaware was the introduction of peach orchards. Successful peach farmers stood to make a handsome profit from the fruit. One 400.0-acre orchard in Delaware netted the owner \$38,000 in one growing season (nearly \$700,000 in 2004 dollars; Rutter 1880: 81). Farmers in southern portions of the state planted peach orchards in anticipation of the railroad’s arrival. Prior to the arrival of the railroad, large-scale peach production would have been nearly impossible. Transportation of peaches, a fruit easily damaged, over nineteenth-century roads would have made the venture unprofitable. The railroad however, offered a mode of transportation that conveyed the product to market with minimal damage and spoilage.

Figure 3
1868 Beers' Atlas of Delaware
 SR I, Frederica Interchange
 South Murderkill Hundred, Kent County, Delaware



Between 1860 and 1870, the value of Kent County's orchard products jumped from \$35,694 to \$489,283 (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998, approximately \$775,000 and \$12 million, respectively, in 2004 dollars). During the 1870s, farmers in Kent County also began organizing Grange Halls. As in other parts of the country, the Grange offered a forum for the discussion of scientific crop management and techniques. The Grange also consolidated the buying power of the local farmers to obtain favorable prices on fertilizers, equipment, seed, and shipping rates (Delaware Humanities Forum 1984:19). With these improvements in techniques, organization and technology, agriculture in Kent County quickly became a profitable venture.

Racial Characteristics of Kent County. In the antebellum period, one demographic aspect set Kent County apart from other counties in Delaware and the rest of the United States. The 1860 census, the last taken before passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, enumerated 7,721 free blacks living in Kent County. This accounted for over 26 percent of the total population of Kent County at a time when free blacks accounted for approximately 15 percent of Delaware's population, and only 1.5 percent of the total U.S. population (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998). No other county in the nation boasted of such a high percentage of free blacks. While slavery did exist in Kent County (census takers counted 203 in 1860), it is clear that it did not represent a major institution. A few factors account for the high percentage of free blacks in Kent County. Environmental characteristics of the Delaware region offered a relatively short growing season and prevented the cultivation of a one-crop economic system. This made the expense of keeping slaves year-round impractical. Farm owners found it more economical to hire workers, in many cases African-Americans, during the summer growing season only.

Political factors also may have induced free blacks to settle in Kent County. The laws, regulations, and social customs of the state reflected both their need for "Negro labor" and their belief in the doctrine of white superiority. The economic reality and the desire to uphold a social hierarchy resulted in an ambivalent record of race relations in the state. Delaware became the first slave state to abolish the domestic slave trade, and the Delaware courts developed a doctrine that presumed persons of color free unless proven otherwise. Delaware was the only slave state

to implement such a policy. However, Delaware also passed Jim Crow laws prior to the start of hostilities between the North and the South.

4.2.3 Suburbanization 1880-2000

The Demise of the Peach Orchard. Peaches presented many difficulties to growers, which ultimately led to the demise of the industry in Delaware. Orchards required intensive maintenance of the soil, and the productive life of a peach tree lasted approximately 20 years. Despite these obstacles, peaches remained a cash crop in Kent County for decades. An outbreak of a disease known as “peach yellows” infected many orchards during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. The yellows appeared in the region as early as 1806, but did not hit the newly planted orchards in Southern Delaware until the late nineteenth century. The disease caused fruit to mature rapidly, tainted the flavor, turned foliage yellow, and ultimately destroyed the tree within two growing seasons (Rutter 1880:11). By 1890, the yellows infected many of the orchards in nearly all parts of the state. By this time, however, growers in the south began diversifying their crops (Delaware Humanities Forum 1984:21).

During this period, many growers destroyed their peach trees and planted apple trees. In 1909, the state still enumerated nearly 1.4 million peach trees. Fifteen years later, that number dropped to approximately one-half million, although the state still harvested over 355 thousand bushels of peaches in that year. During this same period, the number of apple trees rose from less than 700,000 to nearly 1.1 million, and the number of bushels harvested rose to over 824,000 (Bevan 1929: 761). The switch to apple orchards in the early twentieth century made Kent County the largest fruit and nut-producing County in Delaware. The value of the crop rose from \$231,803 in 1910 to nearly \$1.3 million in 1920. The yearly value of the crop continued to grow over the next decade, exceeding \$1.6 million in 1930. By 1950, however, the value of fruit and nut products fell to \$388,000 (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998). Area farmers continued to harvest orchard products, but never again would it figure so prominently into the economic success of Kent County.

Changing Settlement Patterns. By the early twentieth century, the pattern and density of settlement in Delaware had spread from localized urban centers to interlocked suburban

communities across the state. Small communities were replaced by commercial and industrial “strip” development along major roads. The introduction of the automobile gave people a means to travel beyond the confines of a train or boat in a short period of time. Improvements to the state road system expanded manufacture, commerce, and agriculture throughout the state. The earliest DelDOT construction plans for the SR 1 roadway near Frederica date to June 23, 1919. The agency was then known as the “The State of Delaware State Highway Department”, and these early plans are the first in a series that were updated and changed over the years. The 1919 set of plans was entitled “Plan for the Construction of Route No. K-1 Contract No. 17.” The “K” undoubtedly refers to the Kent County portion of what eventually became known as SR 1. The next set of plans – Contract No. 24 – are undated, but they are likely from the ‘teens or ‘twenties. These drawings show the section of today’s SR 12, running west toward Frederica from SR 1, and it includes a scheme for the bridge over Spring Creek (the bridge was recently replaced by a new bridge). (The State of Delaware State Highway Department, also; The State of Delaware Department of Highways and Transportation; various dates).

The Dupont Highway (US 13/113), opened in 1924, connected northern and southern Delaware and shifted the state’s agricultural production permanently towards non-local markets. The DuPont Highway is designated US 13 from Wilmington to Dover and US 113 on southward to the Maryland border. Named for T. Colman Dupont, who personally financed the project, the DuPont Highway was the first modern, paved road to run the entire length of Delaware http://kyky.essortment.com/duponthighway_rgwc.htm (accessed 12 November 2003). In 1933 the State Highway Department widened the DuPont Highway (http://www.hsd.org/DHE/DHE_where_transport_Rt13.htm, accessed August 25, 2004), making it one of the country’s earliest divided highways.

Turning again to the Frederica portion of the roadway, the State Highway Department’s Contract No. 917 contains plans from the 1930s (exact year not given) and shows the roadway being widened within the project area. By 1947, Contract No. 919, the road was widened again and resurfaced, and the plans cover a 9.7-mile stretch of SR 1 from Magnolia and Little Heaven southward to Frederica. In 1963, the road was re-designed to carry speeds of 60 mph, and major improvements were made to the intersection of the “Frederica By-Pass” (today’s SR 1) and SR

12. Contract No. 71-05-004 is from a later period, but the exact year is unknown. These plans called for additional widening of “U.S. 113 from Frederica to Little Heaven”. By the time of this contract, the agency was known as “The State of Delaware Department of Highways and Transportation” (The State of Delaware State Highway Department, also; The State of Delaware Department of Highways and Transportation; various dates).”

At the close of 1940, Kent County remained a largely rural, agricultural area. This is shown clearly on a 1936 topographic map of the area (Figure 4). The 1940 census enumerated nearly 3,000 farms in Kent County with an average farm size of over 100.0 acres. In the 60-year period from 1880 to 1940, the population of Kent County remained almost unchanged, while the population of the rest of Delaware grew rapidly. During this period, the population of Kent County rose from 32,874 to 34,441, an increase of less than five percent. The population of the rest of the state, however, more than doubled from 113,734 to 232,064 during the same period (University of Virginia: U.S. Historical Census Browser 1998). These statistics reveal the intense agricultural nature of Southern Delaware. Agricultural land remained too valuable to destroy for residential or industrial development. The Second World War and the subsequent Cold War brought changes to Southern Delaware and forever altered the landscape of Kent County.

Since the mid-twentieth century, Kent County has experienced the normal shift away from agrarian pursuits. The immediate project area, however, continued to remain agricultural as shown in a 1954 aerial photo (Figure 5). The major employers in the county now include the State and Local Government and the Dover Air Force Base. The majority (approximately 28.5 percent) of the total employed civilian population of Kent County is engaged in management, professional, and related occupations. Approximately 26.9 percent is engaged in sales and office occupations; 17 percent is engaged in educational, health, and social services; 15.3 percent is engaged in production, transportation, and material moving occupations; and 11.6 percent is engaged in construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations. Presently, only 0.7 percent is engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing occupations (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=01000US&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=kent&_cityTown=&_state=04000US10&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on).

Figure 4
1936 USGS Topographic Map of Project Study Area
SR I, Frederica Interchange
South Murderkill Hundred, Kent County, Delaware

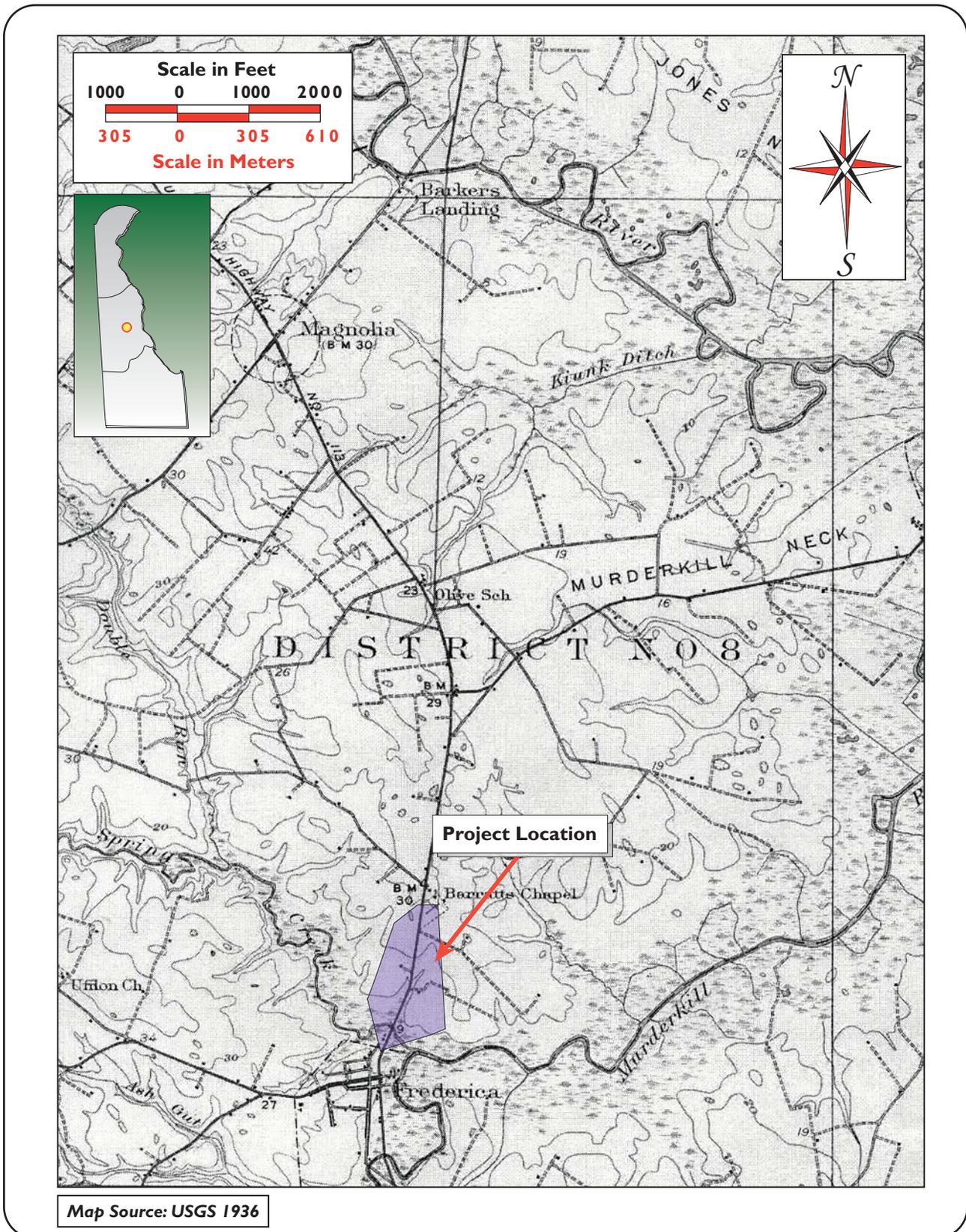


Figure 5
1954 Aerial Photograph of Project Study Area
SR I, Frederica Interchange
South Murderkill Hundred, Kent County, Delaware

