4. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Regional Historic Context

The earliest Europeans to colonize the area of what is now northern Delaware were the Dutch and the Swedes, beginning in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. In 1631, the Dutch, under the auspices of the Dutch West India Company, were the first to establish a presence in the region in the form of a whaling station, known as Fort Oliphant, located near the present-day town of Lewes. After this outpost was subsequently destroyed by Indians a year or so later, no new European settlements were attempted in this vicinity until 1638 when agents of the New Sweden Company established Fort Christiana, along with the associated village of Christianahamm, near what is now the City of Wilmington (Weslager 1947). Dutch hegemony in the lower Delaware Valley was re-established after seizing control of New Sweden in 1655, and the town of New Amstel (modern New Castle) became the economic and commercial center in the area (Conrad 1908).

Control of the region switched hands once again in 1664 when the British assumed title to all Dutch possessions in the New World. Following English succession to the region the expansion of settled areas proceeded in earnest, with grants increasingly issued to individuals willing to "improve" interior lands, especially those along major tributary streams such as the Christina River and Brandywine, Appoqinimink, White Clay, and Red Clay Creeks. Reflecting this rapid spread of colonists, New Castle County was established in 1673 (Conrad 1908).

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries settlement of interior areas of New Castle County proceeded at a slow but steady pace, with towns gradually springing up around milling and shipbuilding industries established along major drainages such as the Christina River, and White and Red Clay Creeks. By 1814, a total of 16 water-powered mills, including seven grist, six saw, two cotton mills, and one snuff mill, were located along the banks of Red Clay Creek alone (Weslager 1947). While riverine areas received more concentrated settlements and industrial growth, lands further removed from larger waterways were primarily developed for agricultural pursuits, and especially for the cultivation of grains and fruit. Settlement within interior areas most commonly involved the establishment of large agricultural tracts well dispersed among a series of small, widely-spaced villages; a land-use pattern that predominated until well into the second half of the nineteenth century (Hoeffecker, 1988). This characteristic development, along with an absence of efficient road systems, helped to keep population densities relatively low in parts of the County situated outside of the larger industrial centers and transportation hubs (Taylor 1951).

Local Historic Context

The present-day town of Hockessin was originally part of a large 15,000-acre land grant, called 'Stenning Manor', given by William Penn to his daughter Letitia in 1701 (Figure 4). Following the breakup of this estate the lands in the vicinity of the current project area were sold to John Houghton, in 1715. The first settlers to the area arrived shortly thereafter and were primarily of Quaker heritage. These founding families established the town of Hockessin, a Native American word that means "Place of many foxes" (Lake 1997), as a quiet, rural, primarily agriculture-based community. That general character persisted relatively unchanged until well into the twentieth century.

Originally consisting of little more than a number of widely scattered farmsteads connected by an informal network of farm roads and trails, the establishment of what is now Old Lancaster Turnpike, in

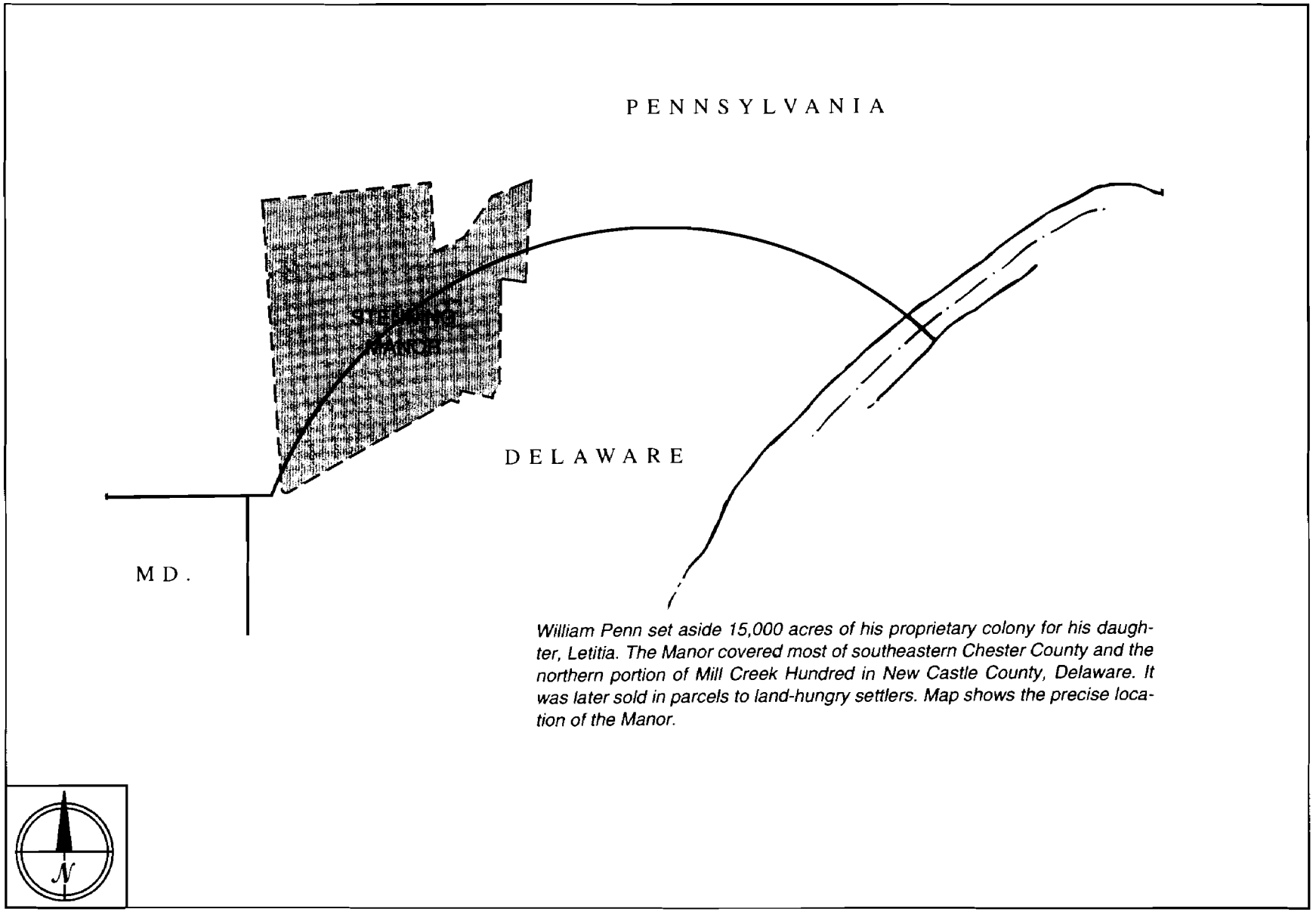

Figure 4. Map showing the location of Stenning Manor (Source: J. Lake, *Hockessin A Pictorial History*, 2nd Edition, Friends of the Hockessin Library 1997).

the early nineteenth century, provided a better means of transportation for moving agricultural produce to markets in Wilmington and encouraged the continued settlement of the area. The town of Hockessin, itself, was established along this central thoroughfare. Travel between outside areas was further enhanced in the mid-nineteenth century when Valley Road was constructed in order to link the Lancaster Turnpike with Limestone Road and the (now Old) Wilmington Road (Joseph Lake, personal communication, June 2002; Figure 5).

In the middle of the nineteenth century the character of industry in the Hockessin vicinity changed somewhat following the discovery of a source of high quality clay near the town of Kaolin, Pennsylvania. So-called kaolin clay deposits, used extensively in the manufacture of smoking pipes, were eventually also identified in the vicinity of Hockessin and led to the inception of numerous quarries for the extraction and processing of this valuable raw material. While initially relatively small-scale operations, kaolin quarries were able to significantly increase production after 1872, following the opening of the Wilmington and Western Railroad through Hockessin. Later reorganized as the Delaware Western Railroad, in the late 1870s, and incorporated into the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad system in 1885, this rail line facilitated the movement of kaolin clay, vulcanized fiber materials, snuff, iron, and coal between downtown Wilmington, Delaware and Landenberg, Pennsylvania via the Red Clay Valley, and with it encouraged increased population growth in the Hockessin vicinity (Wilmington And Western Railroad 2002; Lake 1997).

By the beginning of the twentieth century kaolin clay production had ceased to be a significant industry in the Hockessin area, but was replaced in short order by the establishment of large-scale mushroom cultivation (Lake 1997). Through the first half of the twentieth century agricultural industries once again dominated commercial activities in this vicinity and remained largely unchanged until the years following World War II. In these recent decades increased highway construction, and in particular the establishment of the current S.R. 41 in the mid-1950s, has dramatically spurred industrial and commercial development and residential growth in the Hockessin area, to the point that today the once quiet little town is beginning to be enveloped by the suburban sprawl of nearby Wilmington.

Jackson-Griffith House Chronology

The earliest reference to a possible structure located within the vicinity of the project area is in 1824, when William Graves opened a store probably located near the intersection of Valley Road and (Old) Lancaster Turnpike. Graves quit the store after only five years and opened another store along Lancaster Turnpike in Loveville (Lake 1997). In 1849 (Figure 6), the property is shown on maps in association with one J. Jackson, however no structure is shown within the project area. The earliest definitive indication of a structure at the site is found on a reproduction of an 1860 map and lists the owner of the property as a "Miss Griffith" (Figure 7).

According to deed record research (Table 3) the first land title transfer for the project area occurred in April 1865 when a parcel of ground and house was sold by James Jackson (Figure 8) to Hannah Griffith (NCC DB Vol. 8B: 51). Unfortunately, these records give no more conclusive indication as to when the house was built. As such, a construction date of somewhere between 1849 and 1860 must be inferred from the above map data. According to Lake (1997), Hannah Griffith at the time of this transfer may have been married to a member of the Jackson family, though it is not known why she retained her maiden name in this, and later transactions. As noted in deed records and by local historians, this house served between 1865 and 1876 as a dwelling, sometime store, and the first federally recognized Post Office for the Hockessin area (sanctioned by the U.S. Congress December 23, 1863; Lake 1997). Jane Griffith, Hannah's sister, is recorded as having served as the first postmistress.

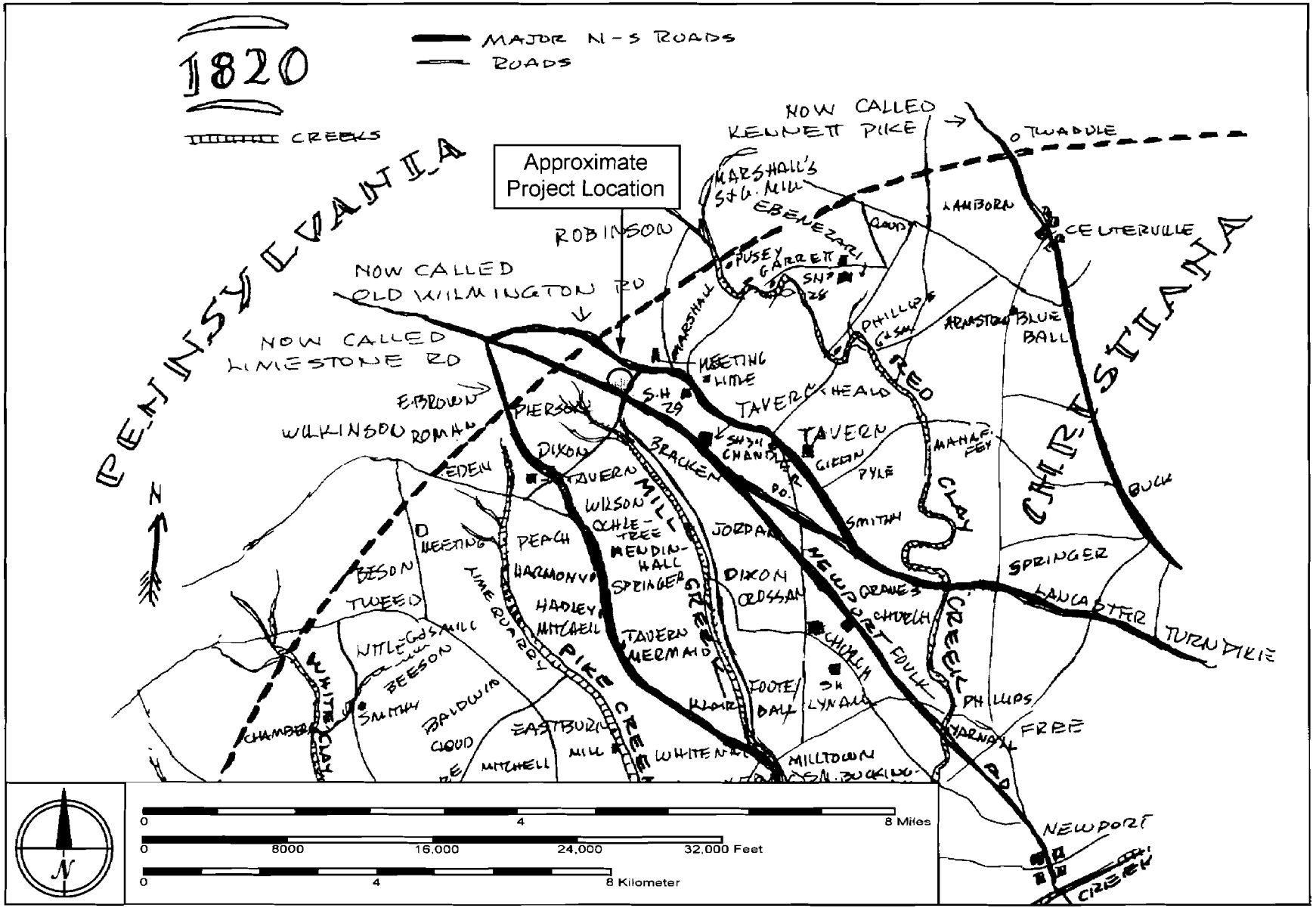

Figure 5. Project area in 1820 (Source: N.C. Sawin, *A Hockessin Diary*, North Light Studio 1987).

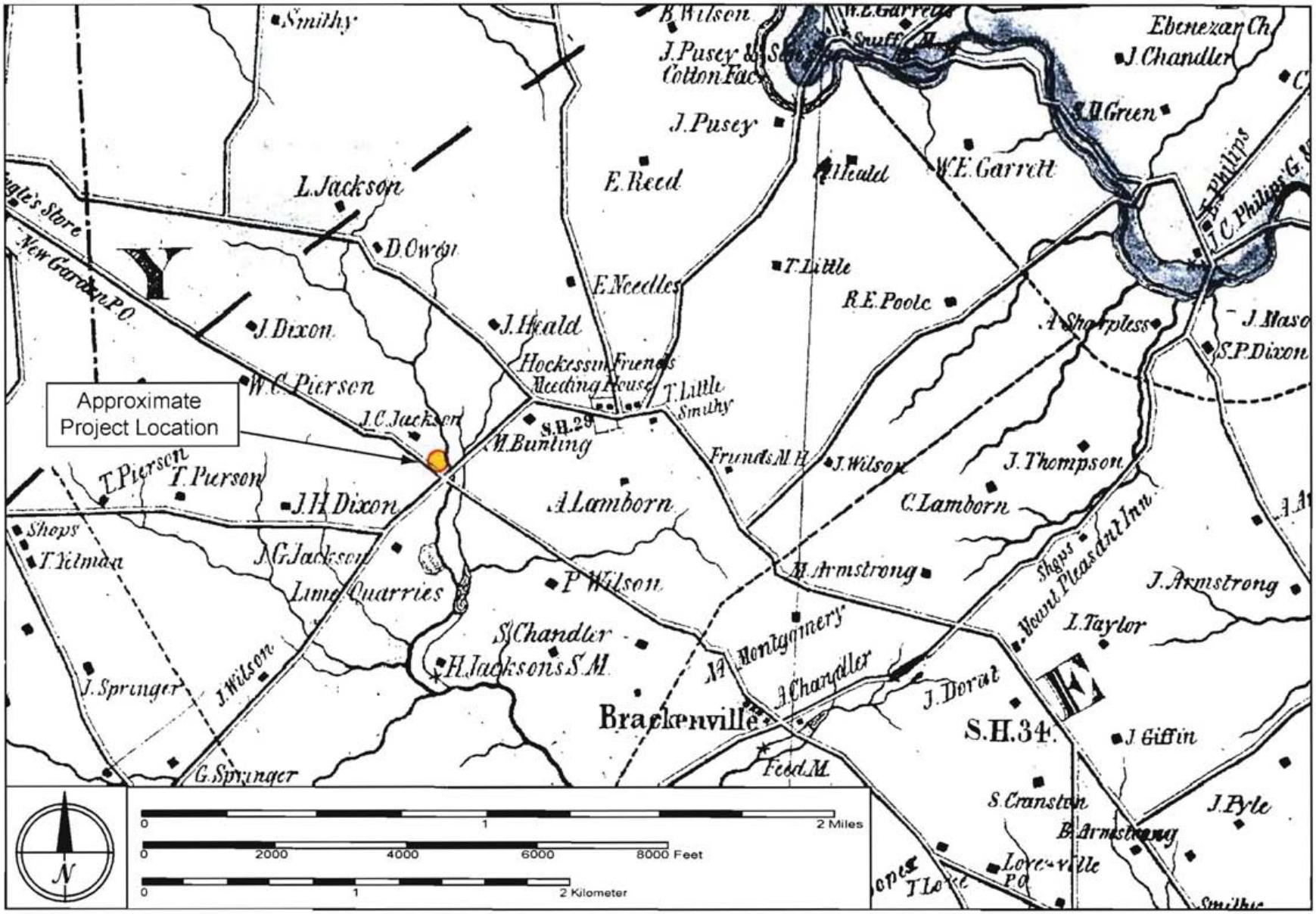

Figure 6. Project area in 1849 (Source: J. Price and S. Rea, *Map of the State of Delaware*, Price and Rea 1849).

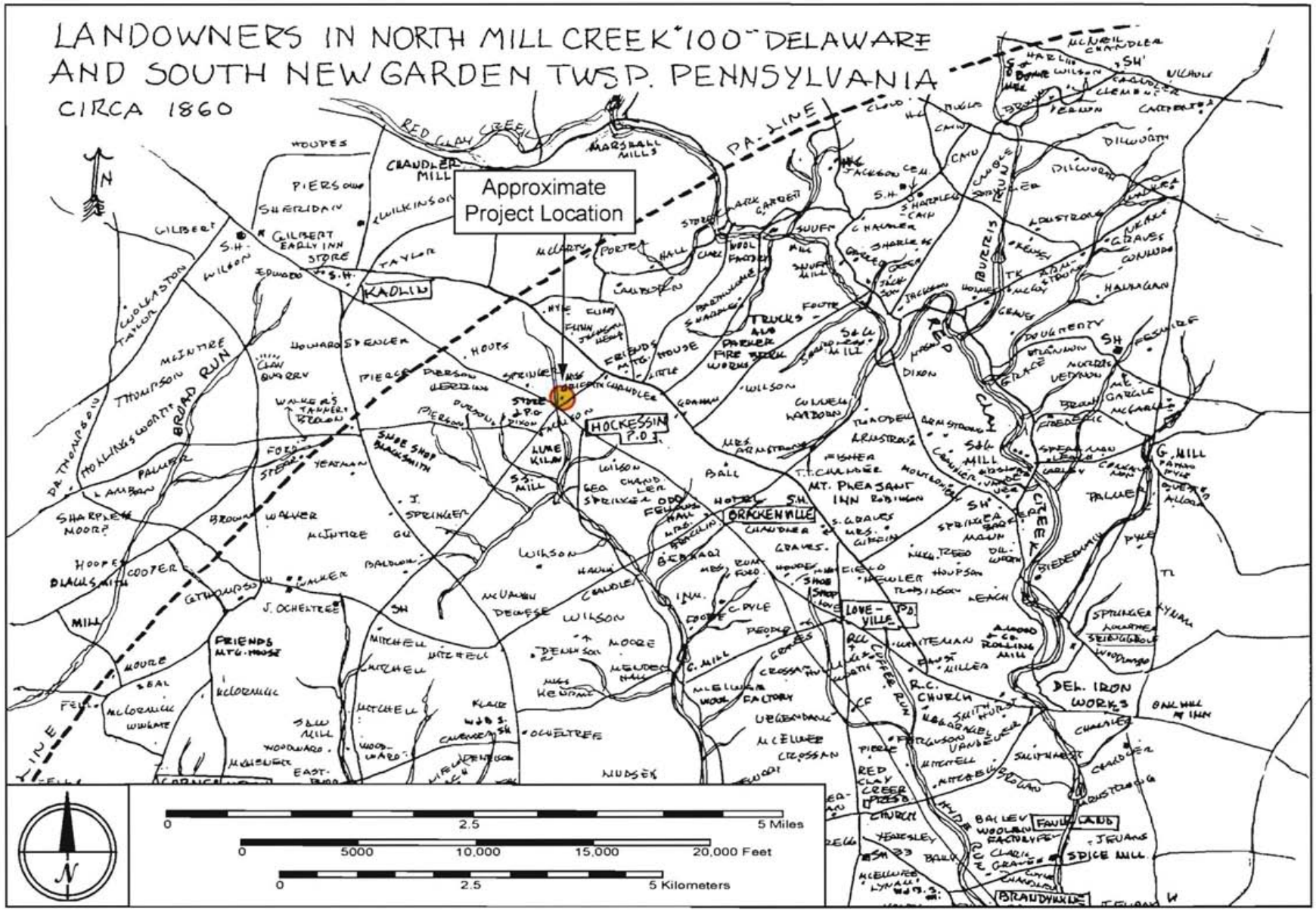

Figure 7. Project area in 1860 (Source: N.C. Sawin, *A Hockessin Diary*, North Light Studio 1987).

Figure 8. Project area in 1868 (Source: D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware*, Pomeroy & Beers 1868).

In December 1876 Hannah Griffith sold the property to a Miss Lydia Gawthrop (NCC DB Vol. 10U: 148), after which the house appears to have function predominantly as a residential dwelling for the remainder of its history. According to Baist's Atlas of Delaware (Figure 9), Miss Gawthrop is listed as the property owner through 1893. By 1920 this land had passed into the hands of one Mary Mitchell, who in November of that year sold the property to Frank McVaugh (NCC DB Vol. 30D: 288). McVaugh kept the property for a little less than two years before he, in turn, sold it to James and Laura Shakespeare, in July 1922 (NCC DB Vol. 31C: 295). The Shakespeare's resided at the property until November 1929, when the house and land was sold at Sheriff's Sale to Thomas and Esther Marshall (NCC DB Vol. 36W: 70). The Marshall's occupied the property through November 1937 and then sold it to John and Mary Accorsi (NCC DB Vol. 41Y: 451). The property remained in possession of the Accorsi family through January 1949 when it was transferred to the State of Delaware (NCC DB Vol. 38.32) in preparation for demolition and the construction of S.R. 41. According to the recollections of a local resident and historian (Joseph Lake, personal communication, June 2002) the Accorsi's may have operated a used car lot from this property for some time prior to its final sale.

Table 3: Record of property transfer according to Deed Book research.

Date of Sale	Grantor	Grantee	Deed Book Ref.
April 1, 1865	James Jackson	Hannah Griffith	Vol. 8B Page 51
Dec. 26, 1876	Hannah Griffith	Lydia Gawthrop	Vol. 10U Page 148
Nov. 29, 1920	Mary Mitchell	Frank McVaugh	Vol. 30D Page 288
July 18, 1922	Frank McVaugh	James & Laura Shakespeare	Vol. 31C Page 295
Nov. 14, 1929	William Lank (Sheriff sale); Note: property owned by James & Laura Shakespeare.	Thomas & Esther Marshall	Vol. 36W Page 70
Nov. 20, 1937	Thomas & Esther Marshall	John & Mary Accorsi	Vol. 41Y Page 451
Jan. 10, 1949	John & Mary Accorsi	State of Delaware	Vol. 38 Page 32

Historic Architectural Assessment of the Jackson-Griffith House

Despite the relatively long occupation of the Jackson-Griffith property, and its apparent service as the community's first post office, only a single photograph of the house is known to exist (Figure 10). Taken in about 1953, shortly before it was demolished by the Delaware Department of Transportation for roadway construction, the photo shows only the front and side portions of the house. While As-Built plans for S.R. 41 (Figure 11) show that this parcel also once contained a back barn and other structures, no additional information about these structures is contained in the photograph. Also not shown is a possible outhouse that one local resident remembered as having been located at the rear of the property, near the barn (Joseph Lake, personal communication, June 2002). Unfortunately, both the barn and outhouse appear to have been buried underneath the roadbed of S.R. 41.

Given the overall paucity of information about the Jackson-Griffith house and property it was thought that all possible efforts should be made to accurately document whatever data is currently available. Toward that end the photograph of the house was provided to Glenn Ceponis, KSK's Director of Historical Services, for the purpose of discussing those aspects of the house's construction and architectural history that could be gleaned from the sole surviving photograph. These observations are presented in the following paragraphs:

A review of historical atlases of the area, and land records for the property, suggest that the house dates from between 1849 and 1860. This is consistent with stylistic elements represented within a ca. 1953 photograph of the two-story building.

The photograph shows an approximately square building with a standing seam metal hip roof, brick chimney, and wrap around porch. The roof and cornice are supported by numerous and regularly spaced wood brackets. This architectural element, along with the roughly square footprint and simple rectangular window openings, is common to vernacular Italianate-styled residences built in the United States between 1840 and 1885.

Other elements shown in the photograph suggest that considerable later alterations were made to the structure by successive owners. Such alterations include the addition of asbestos shingle siding, a wrap around porch, and the six over one double-hung sash. The last two elements are typical of the Colonial Revival style that became popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Italianate sash typically consisted of two over two or one over one double-hung sash, while porch columns associated with the Italianate style tend to be square and narrower. Similarly, the balusters supporting the porch handrail are more consistent with the Colonial Revival than with the Italianate style, as is the allusion to a pediment at the corner of the porch. Moreover, the piers that supported the columns (discovered during the machine-assisted removal of basement fill) were constructed of concrete, suggesting an early twentieth century date for the manufacture of these elements, and by extrapolation for the addition of the porch as well. Finally, the Colonial Revival indicates that the porch was a later addition.

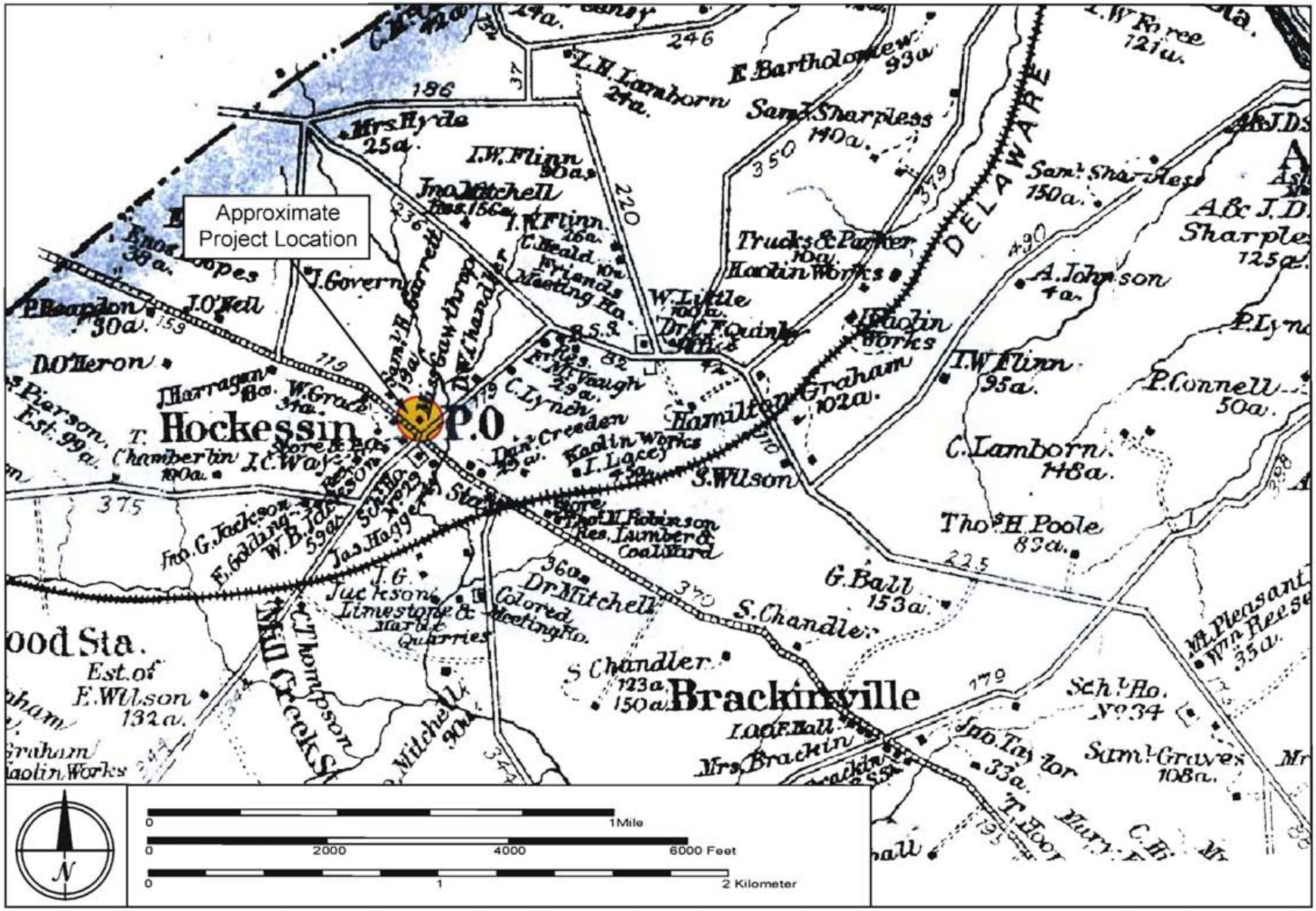

Figure 9. Project area in 1893 (Source: *Atlas of New Castle County*, G. W. Baist 1893).

Figure 10. Jackson-Griffith House circa 1953, shortly before demolition (Source: J. Lake, *Hockessin A Pictorial History*, 2nd Edition, Friends of the Hockessin Library 1997).

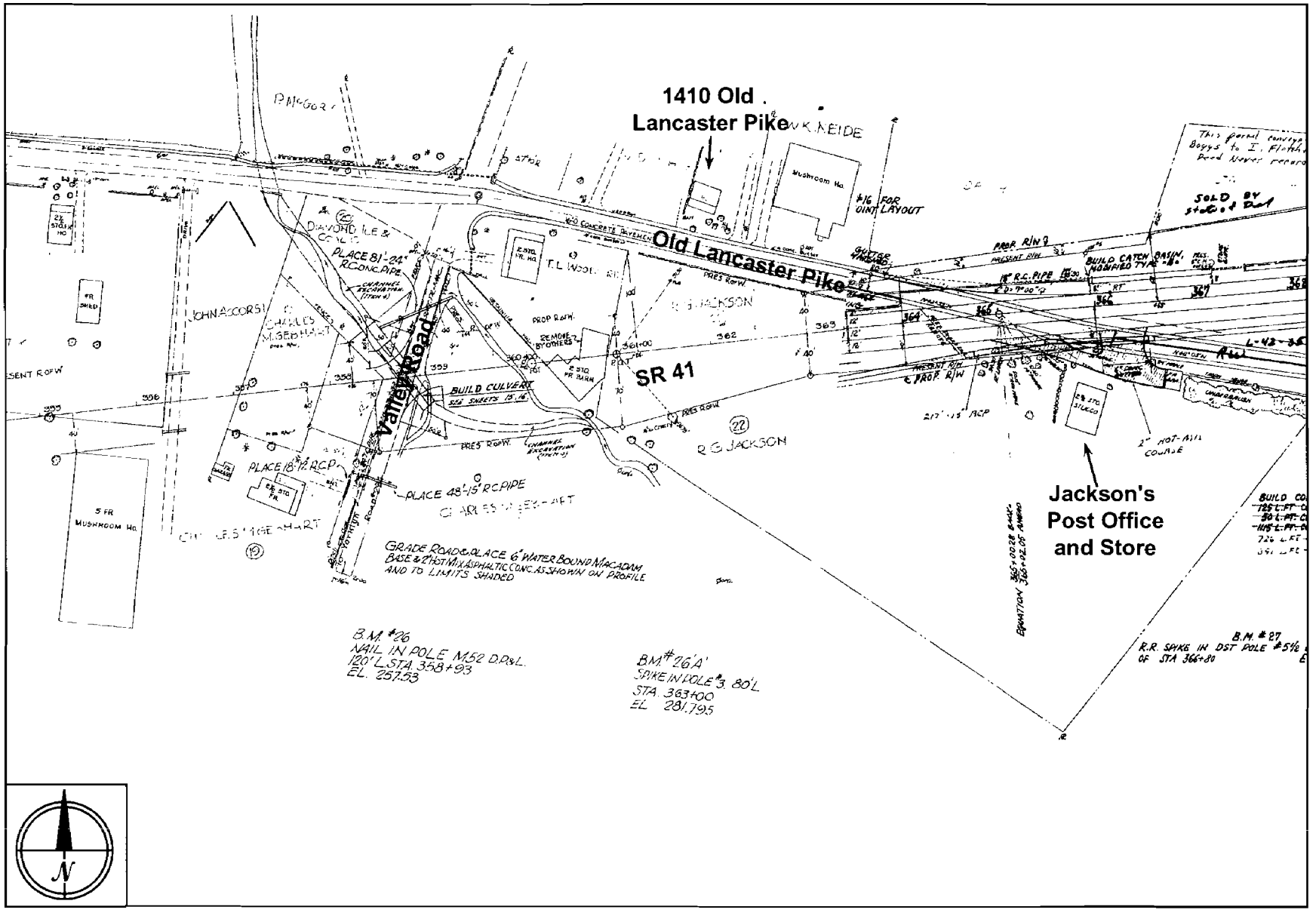

Figure 11. 1952 As-built plans for S.R. 41 in the vicinity of the Phase II project area (Source: Delaware Department of Transportation1952).