4. Human History in the Project Area

PEOPLE MAY HAVE entered the St. Jones valley as early as 12,000 years ago, during the Late Glacial climatic episode. Seasonal variation was not pronounced during this period because of the proximity of the continental ice sheet in the vicinity of what are now the Great Lakes.

Paleo-Indian Period

These earliest inhabitants lived by hunting animals, including large game such as mastodons, mammoths, and other Pleistocene megafauna. Because hunting was so important to their way of life, these people were skilled in making flaked stone projectile points, as well as other stone tools for use in processing the meat, hides, and other animal products.

Settlement seems to have been concentrated west of the project boundaries along the mid-peninsular drainage divide. Small scale hunting camps may have existed near swampy areas such as the bay/basins found within the study area, but for the most part, these settings were not occupied until later in the prehistoric period.

Archaic Period

The Archaic cultural period begins about the same time as the Atlantic environmental episode. The disappearance of the glaciers allowed the development of marked seasonal variation, while the rising sea level allowed the development of marshes, increasing the variety of environmental settings available for exploitation. Within the project area, the bay/basin features would have filled with water during this period.

Paralleling this increase in the environmental and seasonal diversity, the Archaic Period is marked by an increase in the number and variety of tools in use. Of particular interest is the introduction of a variety of ground stone tools, including axes, gouges, grinding stones, and other implements for exploiting plant resources.

Within the project area, Archaic Period sites are most likely to occur in association with the bay/basin features, with some procurement sites being found on knolls overlooking river valleys.

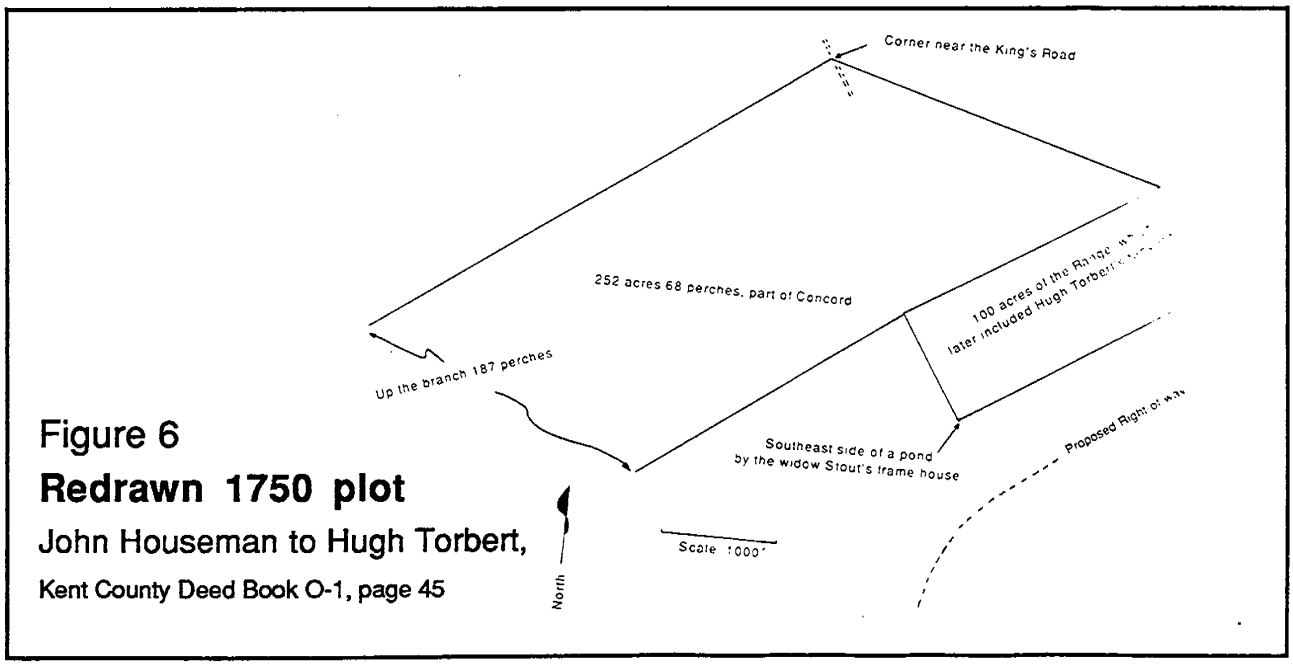

Figure 6
Redrawn 1750 plot
John Houseman to Hugh Torbert,
Kent County Deed Book O-1, page 45

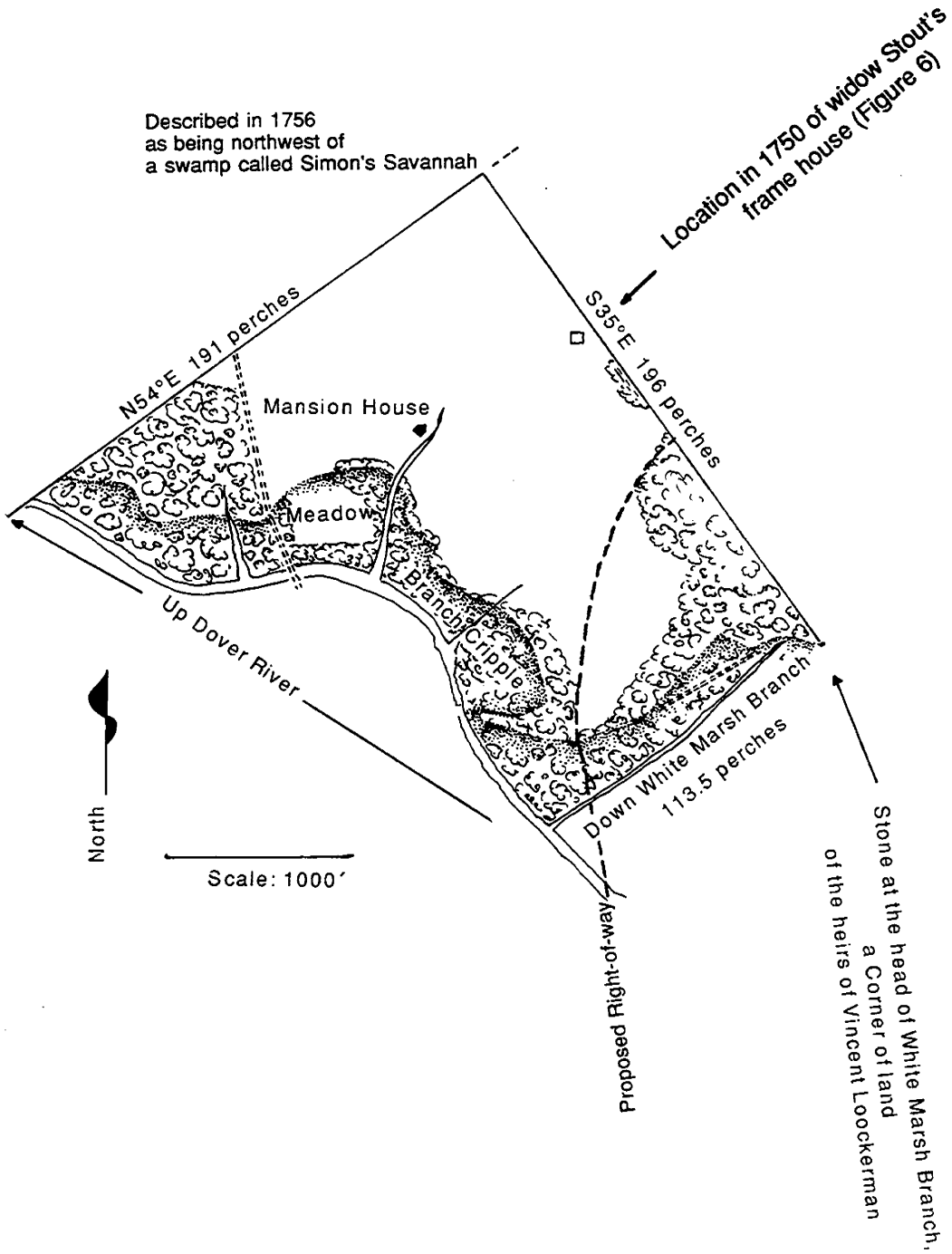

Figure 7
John Ganoe's land, 1805
Redrawn from Orphans Court Plot Book F, Page 197.

WOODLAND I PERIOD

The beginning of the Woodland I cultural period coincides with the beginning of the Sub-boreal environmental episode, a period in which environmental conditions were generally drier than during the preceding Atlantic episode. There was also considerably more variation in climatic patterns than during previous periods. Large base camps developed in the floodplains of major streams and adjacent to major swamps, where the resource base was more reliable because of the variety of resources available. Many small procurement sites were also established along streams and adjacent to bay/basin features. In general, the focus appears to have been on the utilization of a wide variety of resources. This is reflected in the introduction of specialized ground stone tools and in the introduction of stone bowls, and later, of ceramic vessels.

In the project area, a variety of large and small procurement sites are likely to be found, as well as an occassional small base camp. Both headlands overlooking the Fork Branch floodplain and areas adjacent to bay/basin features are likely to have been used for settlements during this period.

WOODLAND II PERIOD

The beginning of the Woodland II period is marked by an change in emphasis, rather than by any dramatic change in cultural patterns. Base camps continue to grow in size, but procurement sites are smaller and fewer in number. The tool kit is less varied than it was during the Woodland I period, but the frequency of storage features has increased, even in smaller sites.

It is likely that the project area was used only for small scale hunting forays. Small procurement sites can be expected, particularly in the wooded fringes along the stream valleys.

CONTACT PERIOD

The contact period is the time of initial contact between European colonists and Native American groups. It begins with the first, indirect experience of Delaware Native Americans with European trade goods and diseases and ends with the disappearance from Delaware of Native Americans as recognizable tribal groups. It is likely that sites of this period will not be easily distinguished from sites of the Woodland II period.

COLONIZATION

Even though the area was not colonized during the Dutch period, several families in the project area bore Dutch ancestry, including such families as Loockerman, Comegys, and Boyer. After the English takeover, settlers from Virginia and New England came into Kent County; among the Virginia immigrants were some who proposed around 1670 to establish a town at the mouth of St. Jones River.

Their effort failed, and Kent County was without a proper settlement for another fifty years, forty years after the county's court was established in 1680.

By then, claimants had taken up land along St. Jones Creek [Dover River] as far up as the head of tidewater at the present site of Dover. The most attractive unclaimed frontier lands still available lay on the inland levels along the main freshwater streams, including parts of the project area.

William Penn's accession in 1682 sparked a new land rush, as his Quaker associates moved into the Delaware Valley in large numbers.

Simon Hirons, who had settled the Chipping Norton tract on Muddy Branch, east of the project area, claimed two tracts, called Range [1000 acres] in 1682 and Concord [670 acres] in 1691 on the headwaters of Dover River. Another early claimant was Jane Bartlett, who took up a tract called Virgin's Choice in 1681 in the area later known as Fox Hall (Scharf 1888:1083).

Under the Dutch and the Duke of York, local courts had taken charge of parcelling out the unclaimed land, but the new proprietor soon concentrated authority in his own land office at Philadelphia. The ensuing period was marked by large grants to Philadelphia merchants and speculators, including members of the Penn family, who

effectively controlled the interior of Kent County for another century.

Nicholas Loockerman (1697-1769), scion of a wealthy New York Dutch merchant family, moved to Kent County about 1723 and established himself as an extensive planter on part of Hirons' Range. Within a few years, he had acquired extensive lands on both sides of the headwaters, some farmed by tenants and some cut for timber. He built a sawmill near where College Road crosses the head of Silver Lake (Scharf 1888:1081-1082).*

THE NORTH [DENNEY] PORTION

The present DelTech Terry Campus and Kent Vo-Tech properties occupy much of the farm where Benjamin Stout lived. His widow's frame house was located in 1750 just east of the present main college building, on the present campus property (FIGURES 6, 7, 8). After Mrs. Stout died, their son Emanuel consolidated his title to the farm in 1752. He then traded it, in 1756, to Lewis Ganoe in return for Ganoe's home place.

Three generations of the Ganoe family owned the farm. John Ganoe, apparently a son of Lewis, died intestate, and in 1805 the farm became the property of his brother Lewis, whose non-resident children in 1824 sold it to Thomas Denney, who died shortly thereafter.

Both the Ganoe and Stout families were among the developers of Fast Landing [Leipsic], on Little Duck Creek [now Leipsic River] at the eastern end of the present Denney's Road. This road was to become a local collector, running from a mill at the head of Maidstone Branch to tidewater; when the Delaware Rail Road was built, DuPont Station was established at the grade crossing.

Thomas Denney was in the process of assembling a sizable farm by purchasing parcels from heirs of former residents. In 1803, he bought an adjacent parcel that had been in the Torbert family since 1750 (FIGURE 6). Between 1805 and 1828, the farm's mansion house site was relocated from a branch of the river, where Ganoe had lived, to a site by Denney's Road, possibly reflecting the trend toward road orientation.

Denney chose to face Denney's Road rather than the state road (now U. S. 13). This choice can be attributed to the fact that roads connecting landings to the hinterland were more important than the north-south road to Philadelphia, since most long-distance commerce travelled by water.

The farm passed in 1828 to James Denney, whose son, John P. M. Denney, inherited it in 1845. John lived on the farm, and in 1871 bought the former Torbert parcels from his cousin Charles Denney. At his death in 1890, John P. M. Denney left both tracts to his daughter Allie P. Moore.

Her heirs in 1936 sold the properties to Frank Wright, who in turn sold the property west of Route 13 to Jacob Zimmerman, Inc. This transaction included parts of both Denney farms. In 1971, Jacob and Charlotte Zimmerman conveyed most of the land to the State of Delaware.

Locations of the Stout, Ganoe, and Denney houses up to 1828 are known from surveys. A later Denney farmstead, still visible in the USGS map (FIGURE 1), was obliterated by construction of the original college. Foundations apparently associated with this later toft were encountered during the recent construction of a wing on the rear of the college building.

THE LOOCKERMAN ESTATES

When Nicholas Loockerman (1697-1769) arrived in Kent County about 1723, he began a land acquisition program that his only son Vincent (1722-1785) continued vigorously.

In 1757, Vincent bought a piece west of the river and part of the Range, 150 acres, from heirs of David Griffin, a Philadelphia joiner. In 1764, Vincent bought 89 acres west of the Dover River from Edmund Badger, a cordwainer, who had inherited it from his father. These tracts, and others, were bought from absentee owners, generally heirs of Philadelphia people who had invested in Kent County real estate during the first generations of the eighteenth century.

* For references and a complete title descent, see Appendix 3 of the file copy of this report at the State Historic Preservation Office, Dover.

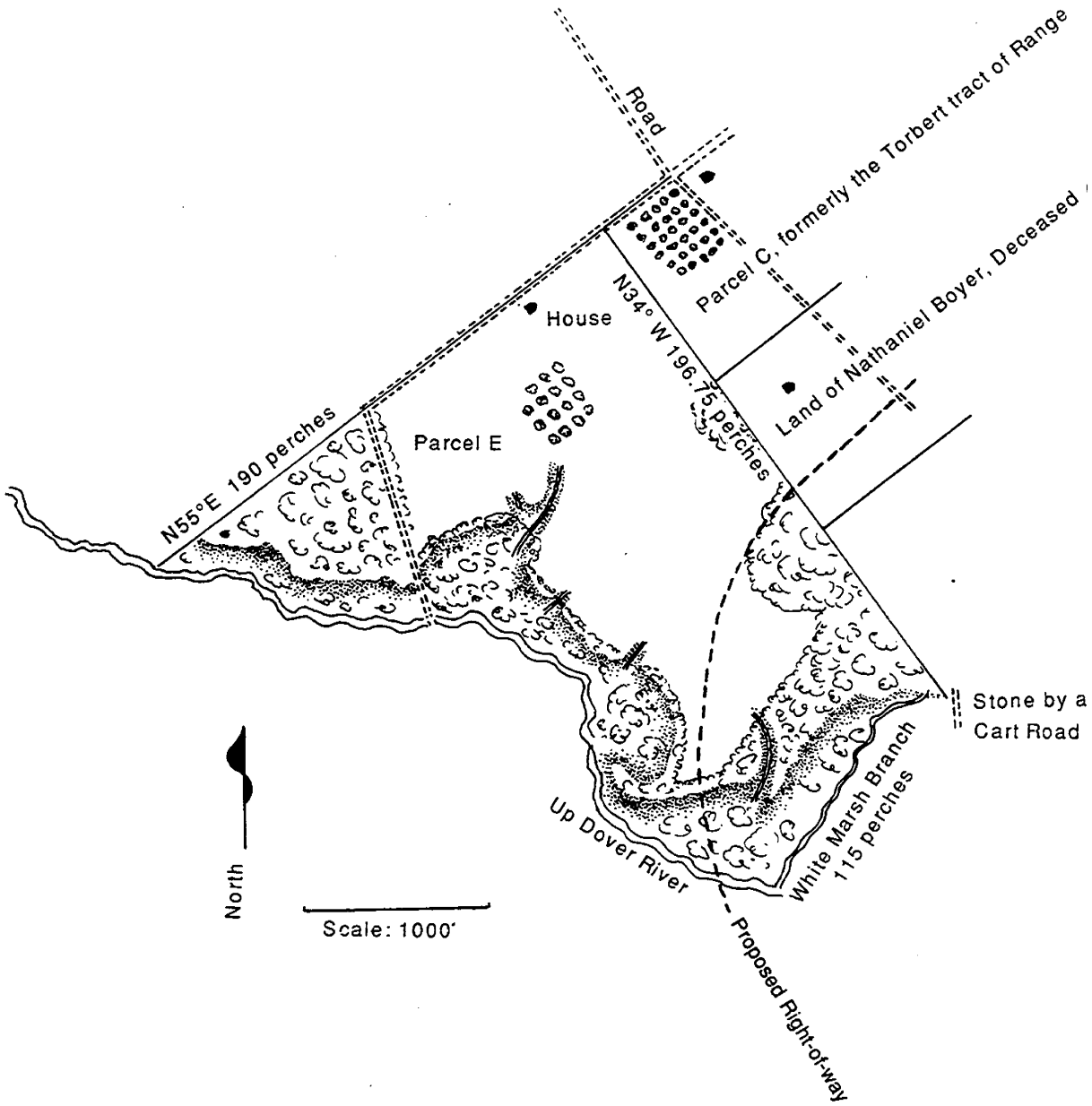

Figure 8
Thomas Denney's land, 1828
Redrawn from Orphans Court Plot Book 1, Page 31.

Vincent Loockerman and his wife Susannah had one son, called Vincent the younger. After the death of his first wife, Vincent, the elder, married Elizabeth Pryor, who was to bear him two additional children, Elizabeth and Nicholas. He provided for his first son, Vincent the younger, by granting him a life estate in all his land in Dover Hundred. This life grant was converted into an outright gift in 1782.

The 1782 deed described 500 acres, assembled from several parcels, west of Dover River and east of Charles Ridgely's Fox Hall tract, including the Badger tract and the Griffin purchase among others. The south boundary was Spring Branch, a stream that crosses McKee Road south of College Road today. Four tenants were identified in the deed. This tract contains all the project area that lies west of the river.

When Vincent the younger died, his daughter Susannah inherited the tract, estimated to contain 746 acres. An Orphans Court valuation in 1796 described two miserable tenant farms, one containing 100 acres arable land farmed by William Farmer, a Negro. Near Fox Hall was an un-fenced farm with 50 acres and an old one-story house, plus a 20-acre field that was to be combined with it. Four tenants in 1782 had dwindled to one tenant and an unrented farm fourteen years later.

Susannah also was a non-resident landowner. While still a minor, she married James Stoops of Philadelphia, and died without reaching her majority. Her share in the paternal estate was divided into shares among her siblings, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Vincent. The middle section, 286 acres, fell to her sister Elizabeth, who married Thomas Davy of Philadelphia.

Improvements consisted of a one-story log dwelling covered with weatherboards, and two or three old out buildings in the tenure of Samuel Burkalow.

After Elizabeth Davy died, Thomas sold the tract to John Pleasanton .