11. William Morris Carney's Toft

THE CARNEY FARMHOUSE (K-6691) is the centerpiece of the Delaware Agricultural Museum in Dover. This house formerly stood in the project area (7K-C-408), on the west side of McKee Road (PLATES 30-32). William Morris Carney and his wife Sallie built the two-story clapboarded frame house in 1893. Their grandson, Noland Morris, sold it in 1970.

As originally built, the house contained four rooms upstairs, two rooms downstairs, and a detached kitchen. The kitchen now located next to the house is not the original structure. As interpreted by the museum, the house is a representation of a typical smallholder's house of the period, based in part upon Carney family data.

In October 1893, William Morris "Mike" Carney bought an eleven-acre woodlot from Rev. John P. DuHamel and his wife. This tract was part of a larger woodlot that had been subdivided among heirs of John Pleasanton, who included the DuHamels.

Sallie Carney bought five acres from Isaac Mosley on the side of the "new" public road in January 1885. The neighbor to the north was Robert Carney. On the south the land was bounded by the rest of Mosley's ten-acre farm. Isaac Mosley and Robert Carney had obtained their properties from Jacob Mosley in October 1884.

The Carneys built their homestead on the five acres. He was a carpenter by trade, and owned tools of the blacksmith's trade as well. The family consisted of her son, Thomas Ridgeway, and their children, Ray Frazier Carney; Elizabeth ("Lizzie"), who married Carlos Morris; and Sallie, born in 1905, who married Samuel Horace Durham.

On Mike's death in 1925, his widow enjoyed life rights until her death in 1949. Real estate in the 1925 appraisal consisted of 30.5 acres at the homesite and a half interest in 19.75 acres on the road from Moores Corner to Dinahs Corner. After Sallie's death, Lizzie was to receive five acres of woodland and the north seven acres of the home farm (FIGURE 30). The rest was conveyed to Frazier, together with the blacksmith shop and his share in the tools. Sallie left the household goods to Lizzie and the farming implements to their son.

Carlos and Elizabeth Morris celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in the house in 1956, with more than 350 family and friends in attendance.

In 1970, Noland Morris, their son, sold the property out of the family to Homer Minus, a dentist who held it as investment.

Dr. Minus gave the house to the museum when an earlier McKee Road improvement threatened to encroach upon its original site (DelDOT Contract 80-012-03). Since the house was moved to the museum, it has been extensively researched and restored. As a result, it is one of the best-documented properties in the community.

HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The two-story frame Carney house, as it now exists at the museum, is a hall-and-parlor house built in the one-room-plan tradition. The front room was the formal parlor, containing the best furniture and the pump organ. It opened on the primarily decorative front porch that faced McKee Road.

Behind, with its gable at right angles, was a second block, also consisting of one room, which would have, in earlier times, been called the hall. This room opened onto two functional back porches, one of which connected to the kitchen. Here the family worked, ate, and socialized.

The rear first-floor room contained two back outside doors, the stairway to the second floor, and the stove that provided much of the family's winter heat.

Early settlers, in their single-cell houses, had performed most household chores in a "hall," or common room, that served for food preparation, handwork, and sleeping. As houses became larger, cooking

and other rough chores were banished to an outside kitchen; separate chambers and parlors were created inside the main house. The hall became the dining or sitting room (Herman 1978:63).

Outdoor or "summer" kitchens were no longer fashionable by the time the Carneys built their house, but they had one. Three of the four houses that were studied in the McKee Road community also had their external kitchens, which were later joined to the houses by enclosed porches

According to Bernard Herman, kitchens commonly were incorporated into the main bodies of houses built after the middle of the nineteenth century in Delaware (Herman 1987: 195). Herman's data, however, is not generally applicable because it draws excessively upon surveys of middle - class European - Americans' households.

In more spacious and stylish houses at the turn of the century, the kitchen was a room in the rear of the house, convenient to the back door. It was segregated from the main house by a dining room and sometimes by other rooms and pantries. If space permitted, larger houses would be equipped with formal "parlors" and less formal "sitting rooms" for family relaxation. Today's functional equivalents are called the "living room" and "family room."

Ability to maintain a formal parlor was considered a mark of gentility or aspirations to it. In some households, with many rooms, several parlors might exist, for use only on formal occasions.

The Carneys devoted a quarter of their limited indoor space to the parlor, as did their neighbors. According to family sources, the parlor contained a pump organ and the family's better furniture.

Two back porches were the focus of family and farm activity. On the south side of the rear ell a covered porch gave access to the pump. A grapevine grew along the back of this porch. On the north was a porch that connected the house with the kitchen and served as a work area for kitchen-related activities. When the house stood on its original site, the north porch had been enclosed, as had the porches on the other surviving houses.

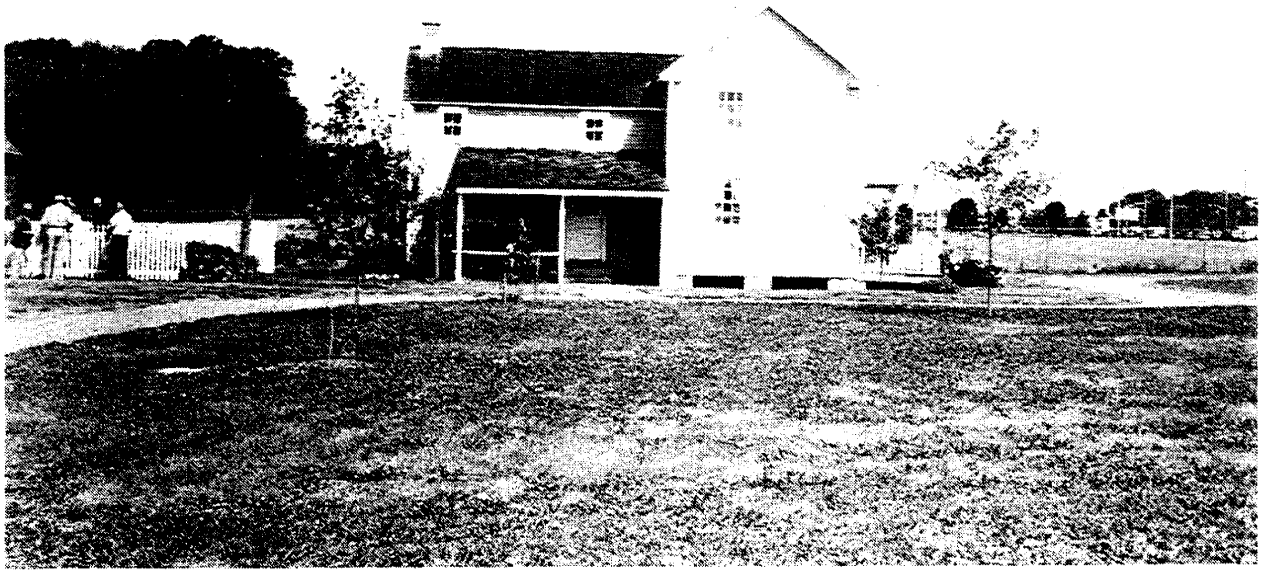

Plate 30

William Morris Carney House, now at the museum grounds, looking north

Plate 31
William Morris Carney House at the museum, from the southeast

Plate 32
William Morris Carney House at the museum, from the northeast

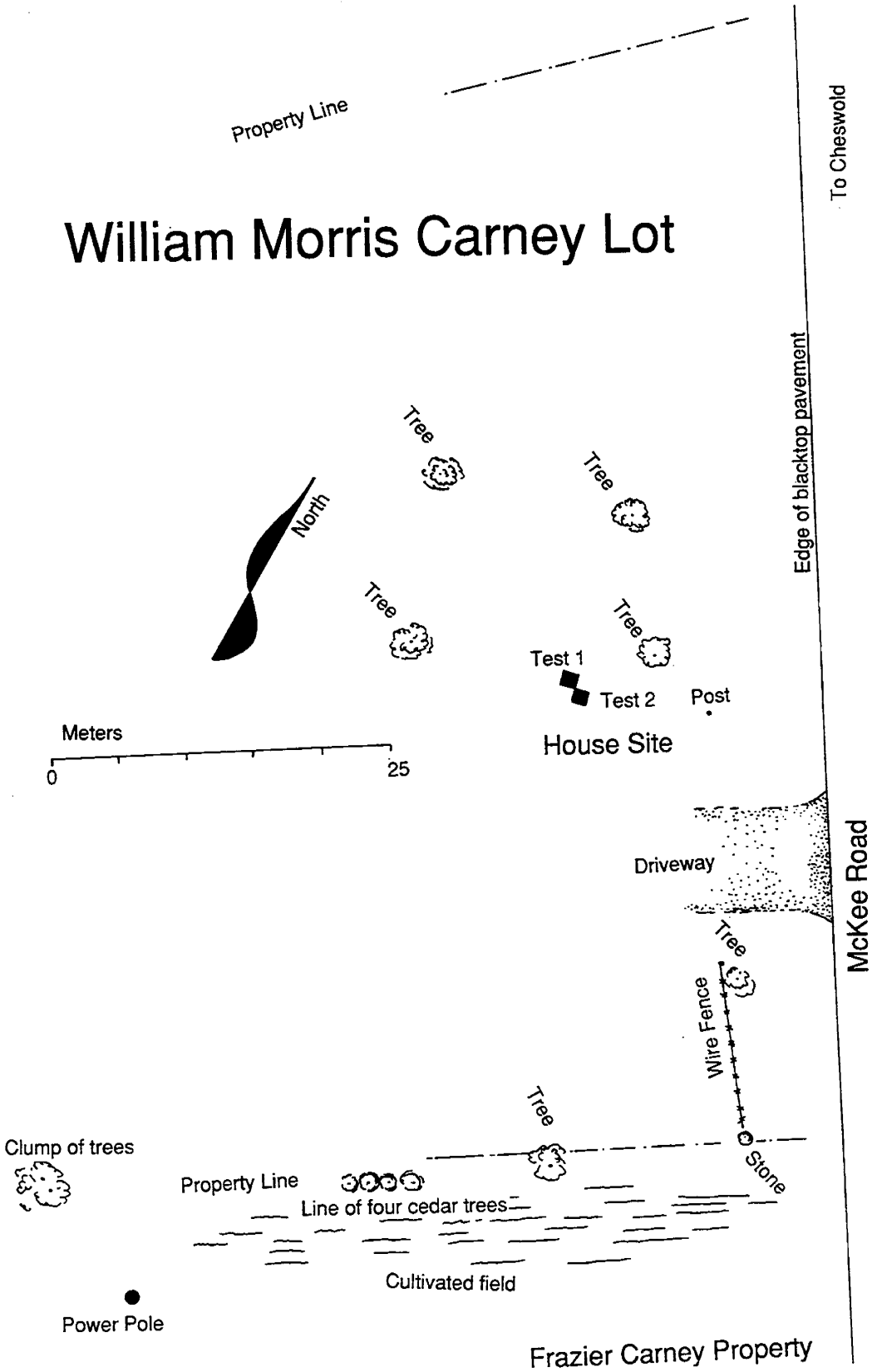

Figure 31

Test units and landscape features on the William Morris Carney site

ARCHÆOLOGY ON THE CARNEY SITE

The moved house at the museum has been thoroughly documented and furnished for public view, but its site had never been examined to determine if intact subsurface remains might survive. Since one aspect of Mosley community significance is its archæological value, subsurface tests were considered necessary to logically complete this study.

A Phase I archæological study of the William Morris Carney toft site was begun October 21, 1992. First, the site was mapped (FIGURE 31) and features from the occupation period were identified. Most of the yard was covered with a thick turf of tall grass, and no built features were visible above grade. Two three-foot-square tests (FIGURE 32) were excavated, in which structural remains were immediately encountered.

In the first test, a layer of yellow fill lay immediately under the turf. Beneath the yellow fill was a pile of bricks, many of them still intact, lying in a relatively coherent tumbled pattern. A smooth brown sandy topsoil, typical of a domestic planting bed, lay under the fill. It overlay a mottled yellow natural layer rich with rootmolds, again typical of a cultivated garden bed.

A second test, diagonally adjacent to the first, also contained a layer of fill under the turf. This fill layer was uniform, and a little darker than the fill in the first test. Immediately beneath the fill was a piece of sheet metal, which was lying on an apparent old ground surface.This surface was marked by two bricks that had been set into it, and a layer of clam shells, with their outer sides facing up, as if to form a pavement.

Under the clam shells was the sandy brown garden soil, which contained artifacts. Two distinct depressions, probably garden beds, appear in the profile of this unit.

Materials recovered from test 2 include asbestos siding fragments and parts of four dishes. When the sherds were reassembled, it was apparent that this was a primary deposit of trash, since each dish was represented by a single large fragment that had been deposited and later fractured into the sherds we found lying close to one another in the former flower bed soil.

The four dishes were all different, suggesting that they might not have been part of sets. They appeared to be similar mass-market white refined earthenware. Their location, near the kitchen site, suggests that they were broken in use by the site's occupants and represent the wares used by the Carney family.

From this evidence, it appears that the house site was subjected to mere cosmetic cleaning and filling after the house was removed. An unknown amount of fill was spread across the site and turf was established atop the fill. Under the thin fill layer, one can expect the archæological evidence of the toft to retain considerable integrity.

Current plans do not call for any part of the property to be taken. If future plans should include any part of this tract, additional testing should be undertaken.

Since this site also is historically part of the Nathan Williams lot, and lies directly opposite the heaviest concentration of artifacts in the field, it should be considered potentially a part of that archæological resource.

Additional excavations would provide valuable information that would be useful to the museum interpretation of the house, both as an exhibit and as a document. The lot is therefore likely to be found eligible for the National Register under criterion D, for its information value.

While the house and toft site are no longer located in the same place, they constitute a single property for study purposes, just as the Elgin Marbles remain an essential part of the Parthenon. The site still can tell us volumes about the house, which has become an important vehicle for study and exposition of nineteenth-century Delaware farmlife.

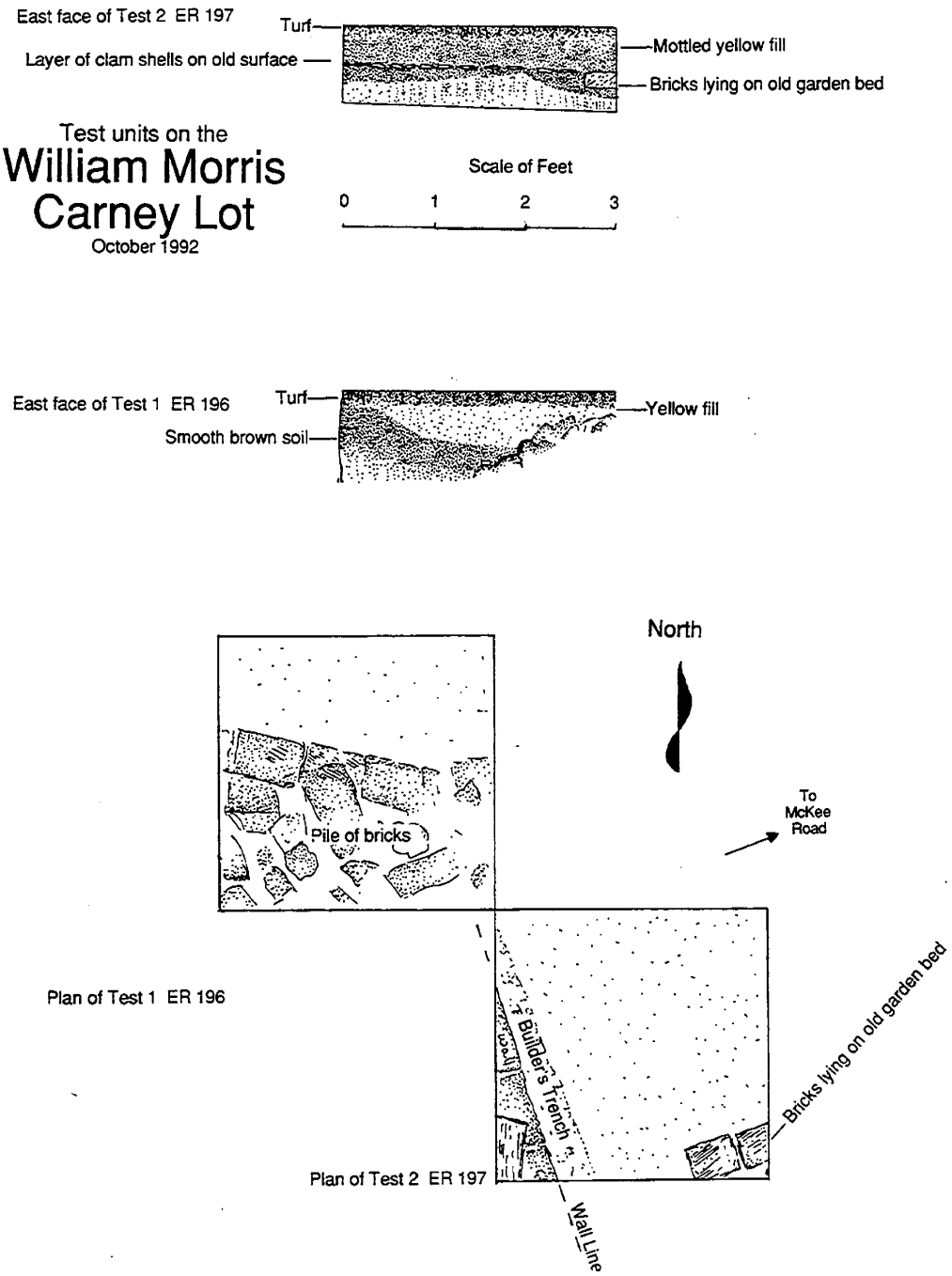

Figure 32

Plans and profiles of test units on the William Morris Carney house site