

### **Section 3.0   Background Research**

Background research was conducted to locate previously identified architectural resources and to evaluate previously unidentified architectural resources within an appropriate historic context. Research was conducted using the DE CHRIS system to identify architectural resources within the APE that are listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register and to review previously conducted cultural resource surveys. Primary and secondary-source research, including maps and atlases, and local and county histories was conducted at the Delaware State Archives and DelDOT. Historic maps, atlases and aerial photographs were consulted through a variety of online resources, including the Hagley Museum and Library, Delaware DataMIL, and DE CHRIS.

#### **3.1   Previous Architectural Surveys**

Preliminary research has indicated that no previous organized architectural surveys have been conducted within the project APE. The only known resource within the project APE (N01601) was discovered to have been demolished. The National Register listed J. Walker Farm (N00285) was situated directly southwest of the APE. The farm complex was demolished between 1992 and 1997.

#### **3.2   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, and Engineering 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **3.3 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 what would become Mill Creek Hundred was almost exclusively settled by immigrants from the British Isles. The organization and construction of places of worship has long been identified by historians as a touchstone for permanent settlements and the establishment of a community identity. The earliest permanent settlers were English and Anglo-Irish Quakers between 1700 and 1750. The Quakers established a meeting house in Hockessin in 1737. Prior to this they met in a private home. Presbyterians actually established the White Clay Creek church as early as 1721. Anglicans and Swedish Lutherans also established houses of worship in the early decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Mill Creek Hundred remained largely rural during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Land was primarily held in smaller tracts and by 1798, the average farm size was 126 acres (Jicha III and Cesna 1986, Section 8 Page 1). The first generation of the built landscape largely consisted of log dwellings, though tax assessments indicate approximately 20% of dwellings were stone indicating either a transition to more permanent architecture or the presence of wealthy landowners (Ibid.).

#### *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).

By mid-century, Piedmont farmers were largely dairy and livestock farming. Grains were raised for feed and animal byproducts were sold for cash crops. This is in contrast to the eighteenth century, during which mixed farming was the common practice. Advances in transportation and improvements in the network granted farmers access to broader markets and as such the products of Mill Creek farms reflected this change.

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

The expansion of railroads and trolley lines into the valleys of the White Clay Creek and Red Clay Creek were accompanied by inevitable changes in land use. At the southern end of the project area land was slowly 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 limited segment of workers to commute to their jobs. In southeastern Mill Creek Hundred, 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 (Ames et al., 1992 134). This first wave of suburban development in Mill Creek Hundred extended to the Hilltop development in 1906 through the Westfield neighborhood in 1930. Later subdivisions included Kiamensi Gardens (1940) and Cooper Farm (1942).

#### *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.

As in many areas of northern New Castle, suburbanization expanded broadly following World War II. Returning soldiers' desire to start families, advancements in housing construction technology and the expansion of the service-based economy combined to expand the housing pie. The suburbanization of the landscape corresponded to the decline of the importance of agriculture to the local economy.

### 3.4 Expected Property Types and Registration Requirements

Historic research identified remnant agricultural properties to be expected within the APE. Agricultural activity was prominent throughout Mill Creek Hundred prior to World War II, thus it would not be uncommon to find an islanded farm house or remnant agricultural outbuilding. Individual agricultural property types are rarely eligible for the National Register. However, when situated in close proximity, in situ and within a relevant agricultural context, they may be eligible as part of a complex. In Delaware, the term agricultural complex is sourced from the 1993 archeological study *Neither a Desert Nor a Paradise: Historic Context for the Archaeology of Agriculture and Rural Life, Sussex County, Delaware, 1770-1940* of Sussex County by Lu Ann De Cunzo and Ann Marie Garcia. Agricultural complexes may consist of dwellings and domestic and agricultural outbuildings. The dwellings may have housed the farm's owners, tenant farmers, farm managers, or other relatives or farm hands. Kitchens, smokehouses, spring houses, sheds, milk houses and wood sheds are among the possible domestic outbuildings. Agricultural outbuildings include different types of barns, stables, machine sheds, granaries, chicken houses and various other less common structures. Other culturally defined spaces such as gardens, fields, work yards, wells and paths can also contribute to the significance of an agricultural complex.

To be significant under Criterion A, an agricultural complex should have the ability to convey information about a significant agricultural trend in Delaware. Eligibility under Criterion B requires a demonstrated association with the productive life of a person significant to the agricultural history of Mill Creek Hundred, New Castle County, or Delaware. Under Criterion C, the resource must retain enough integrity to adequately express architectural significance. Fenestration, massing, materials, and form should remain intact. Spatial relationships should be maintained as well as significant activities. Eligibility under Criterion D requires that the buildings should have the potential to convey information about a significant element that is not readily available from some other source.

Historical research identified post-World War II housing as an expected property type within the APE. Residential development from this period is predominantly characterized by suburban tract housing located outside of an urban center (Chase et al. 1992:60). In actuality, N04337 is an early example of suburban infill or exurbanized development. Due to its far flung location, its connection to economic activity associated with the urban centers of Newark and Wilmington is tenuous at best. It is nearly certain that Frank A. DiSabatino relied upon the economic and governmental services provided in Wilmington and Newark, however, the resource's location and development period places it in the trend of suburban infill or the first wave exurban construction reliant upon services available in the earlier suburbs rather than in the traditional urban centers.

The eligibility of individual mid-century construction has been problematic for the last decade. It is possible, however, for an individual post-World War II resource to demonstrate significance. Under Criterion A, a resource must exemplify an association with a post war trend determined to be significant. Eligibility under Criterion B would be predicated upon a connection with the productive life of a person determined to be of significance to local, county, state or national activities. Eligibility under Criterion C for this time period would be exceedingly unusual. Due to the sheer vastness of construction during this time period, a mid-twentieth century dwelling in any property type would have to possess decidedly unique and exceptional qualities combined with impeccable integrity. Lastly, National Register eligibility under Criterion D is not likely unless a resource was constructed using a rare or experimental technique that engineers or researchers could not readily obtain information about from other sources.

Rather than identifying significant individual examples of mid-twentieth century architectural, concentrated efforts have been made to determine significance through associations with larger patterns of development. If individual dwellings are constructed within residential subdivisions, 2002 National

Park Service guidance *Historic Residential Suburbs, Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places* recommends evaluating the subdivision as a whole for National Register eligibility. In order to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, a subdivision must fit within the historic context of suburban growth outside the urban core during the postwar period. Eligibility under Criterion B requires an historical association with a significant developer of residential properties in New Castle County. Because this period of development is within living memory, oral histories and research into the business contacts of the developer and contractors are potentially valuable resources for establishing Criterion B. In order for a subdivision to be eligible under Criterion C, it must retain its original layout and dwellings and be characteristic of its period of development. Due to copious documentation and ready availability of information on building practices during the mid-twentieth century, it is unlikely that eligibility under Criterion D would be established.

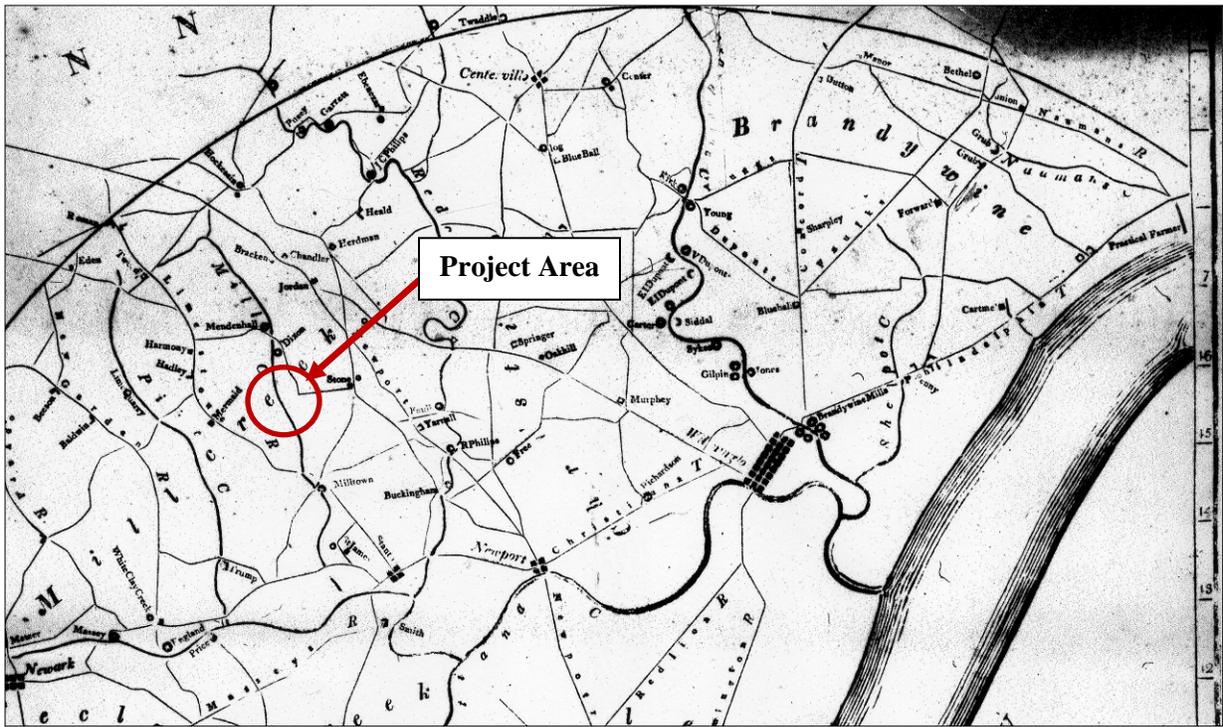


Figure 3.1 Henry Heald Roads of New Castle County Surveyed and Printed, 1820.



Figure 3.2 Samuel M. Rea and Jacob Price, Map of New Castle County, Delaware, 1849

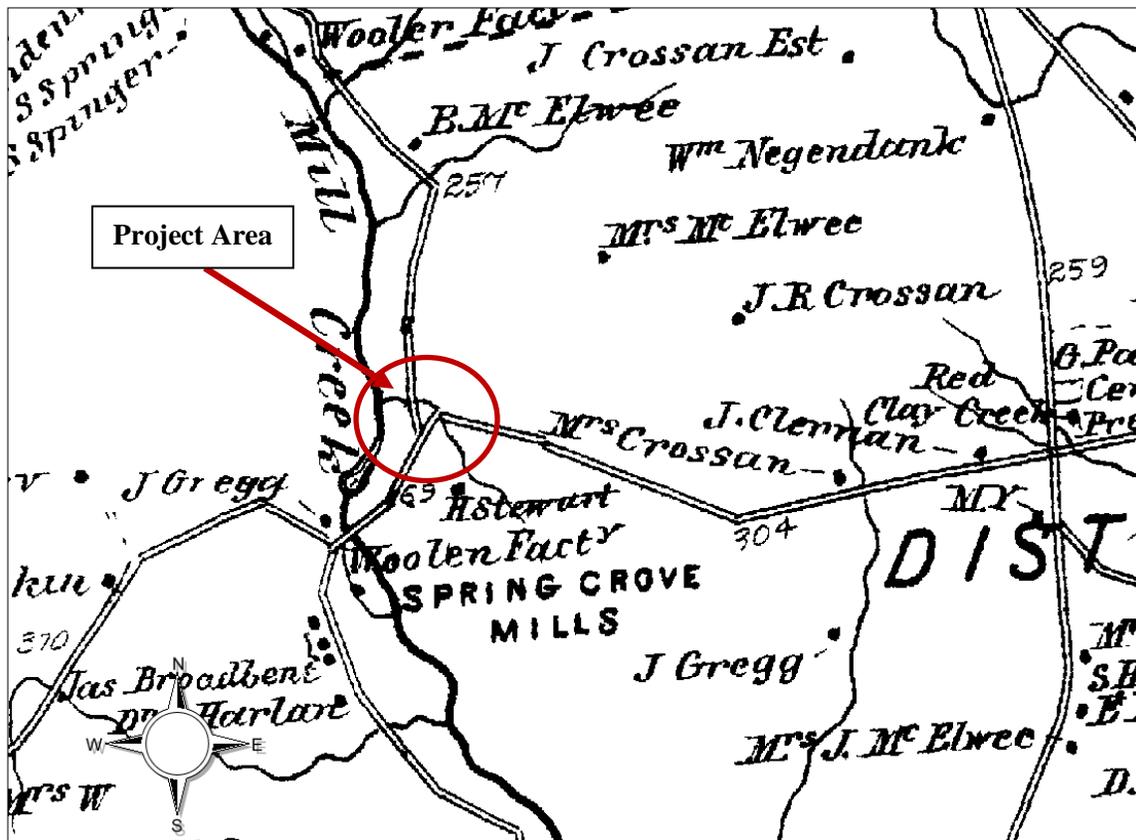


Figure 3-3: J.G. Beers, Atlas of Delaware, 1868.

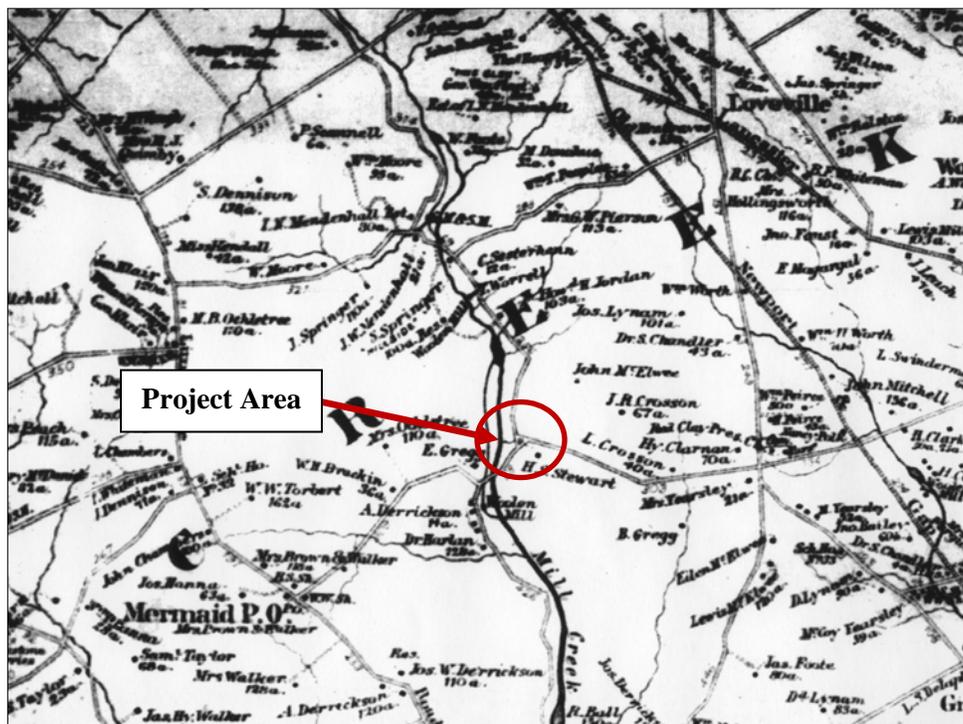


Figure 3-4: Hopkins, Atlas of Delaware, 1868.

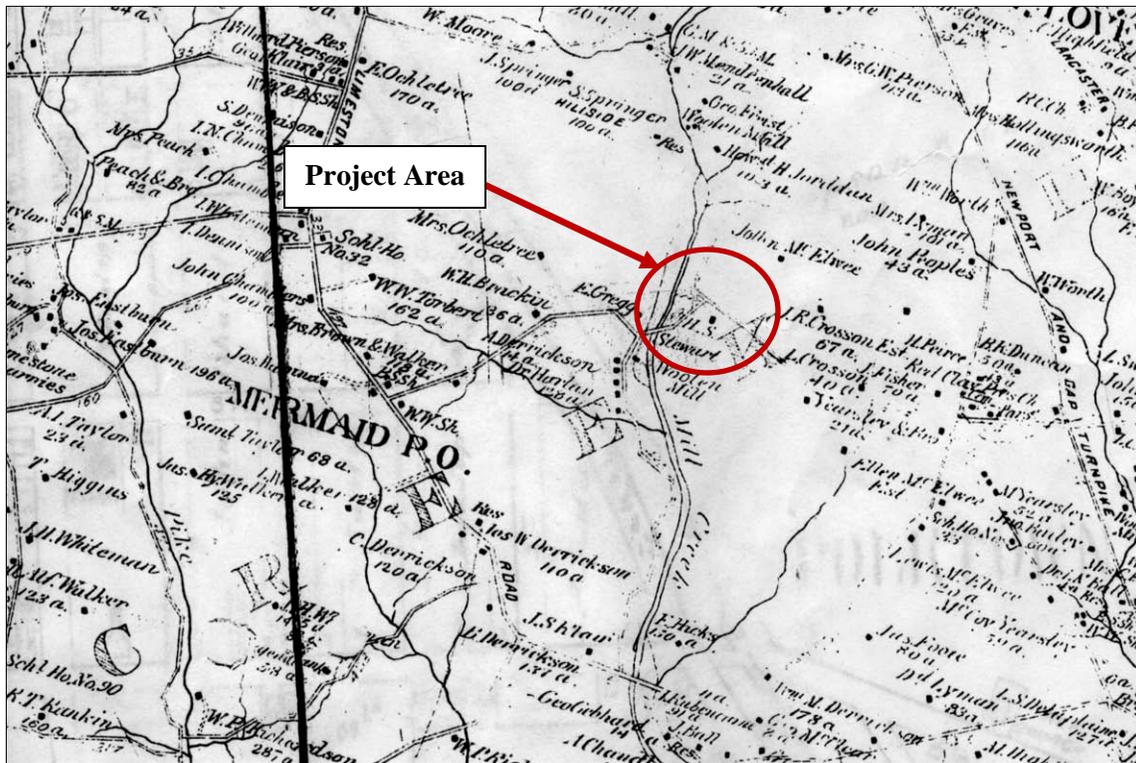


Figure 3.5: William Baist, *Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware*, 1893.

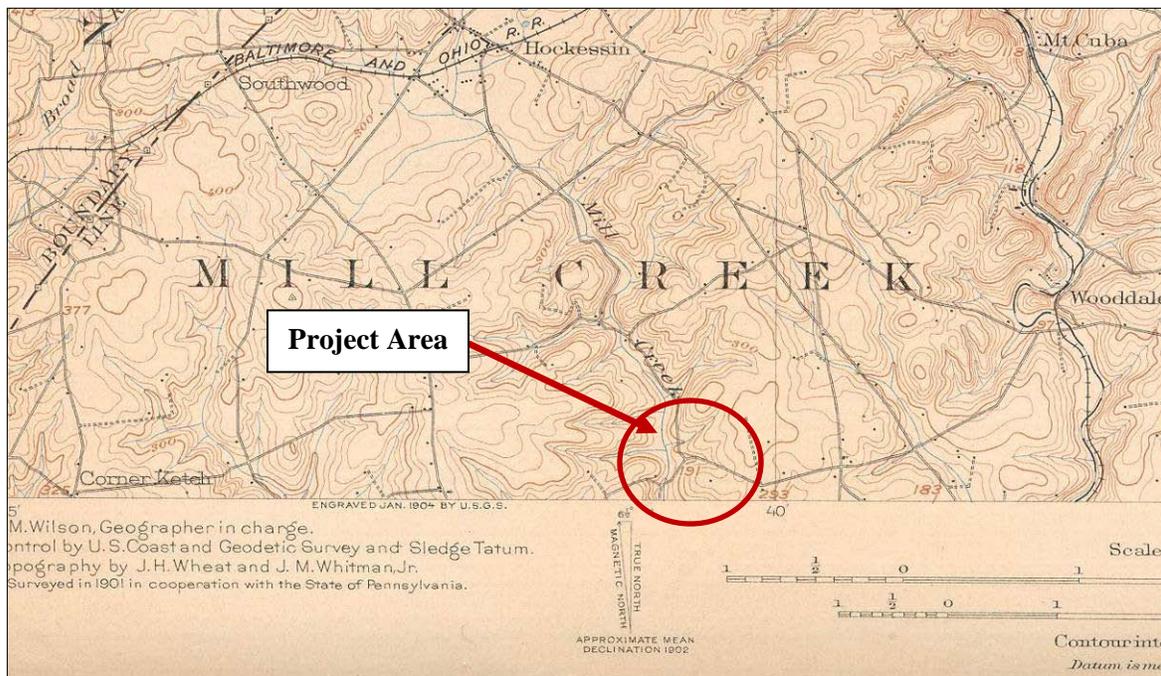
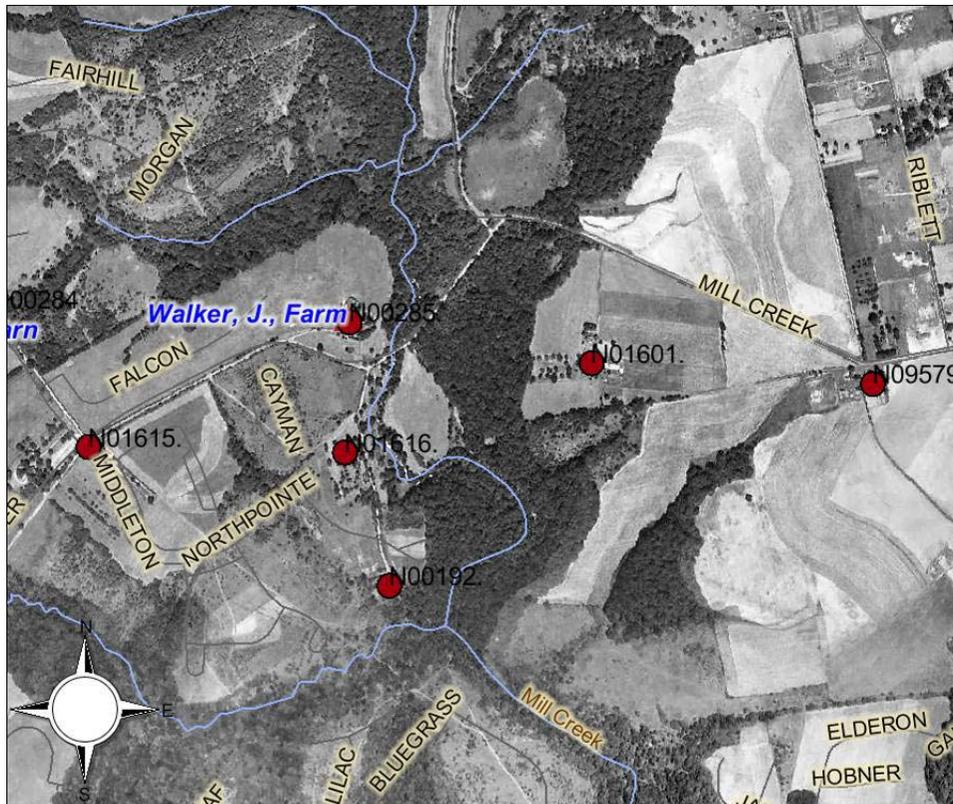


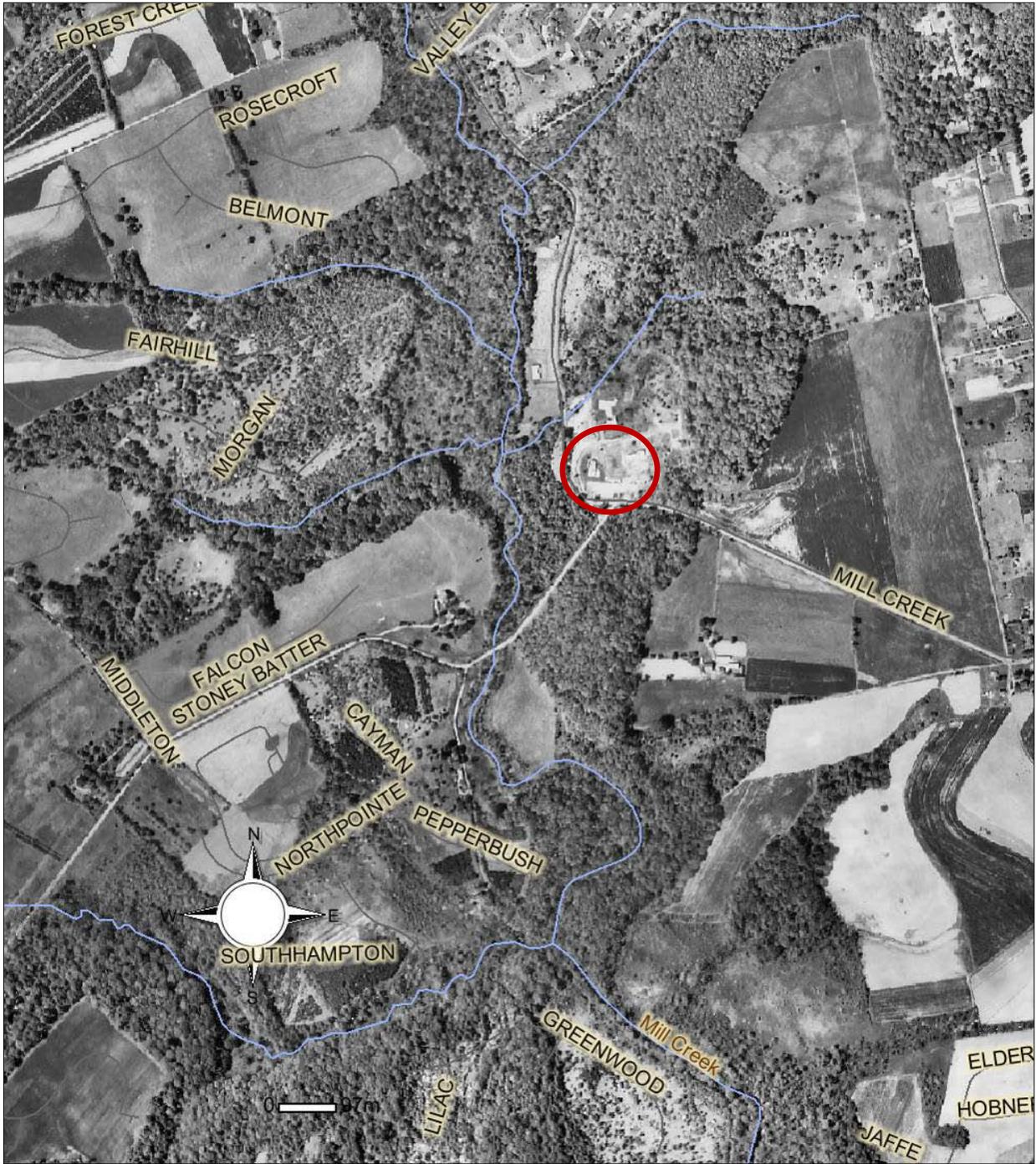
Figure 3.6: 1904 USGS 15' Quadrangle: Kennett Square Southwest, PA-DE.



**Figure 3.7:** 1937 Aerial Photograph of the project area with CRS number overlay. (DE CHRIS)



**Figure 3.8:** 1954 Aerial Photograph of the project area with CRS number overlay (DE CHRIS).



**Figure 3.9:** 1961 Aerial of the project area. Note that the Frank A. DiSabatino House has been constructed (outlined in red).  
(DE CHRIS)