

**Rehoboth Beach Entrance Improvements Project  
SUSSEX COUNTY, DELAWARE**

**Historic Architectural Investigation  
Phase 1 Study Area**

**SUPPLEMENTAL REVISION**

4.1.7 (S-1088) Charles E. Marsh House, Rehoboth Avenue (tax parcel 3-34-13.20-109)

*Description*

The late nineteenth century I-house constructed as a T-plan circa 1870 (Plates 14, 14A, 14B, 14C and 15 and 15A). The 2 and ½ story, 5-bay dwelling features an original façade with side gable roof facing Church Street. The gabled roof is pierced with a center cross-gable peak in the front. The wood frame dwelling has an entry door in the center of the first story façade. The door is flanked by paired one-over-one-windows at each end. The entranceway is sheltered by a front-gabled-hood. A U-shaped driveway provides access towards the rear of dwelling.



Plate 14 Front of Dwelling Looking South



Plate 14A Rear and West Side Looking Northeast



Plate 14B Rear Looking North



Plate 14C Eastern End Looking West

During an interview with the longtime property owner and former resident Mrs. Marsh, she stated the house has been perceptually re-oriented. The original entrance and façade of the property is Church Street. Rehoboth Avenue is the current driveway access and orientation of the dwelling towards the rear. The re-orientation occurred during the family's ownership of the property. However, Mrs. Marsh does not recollect when this re-orientation had occurred, but the house was not moved, nor the interior configuration of rooms. The property has been in the Marsh family holdings since 1895.

Fenestration of the house consists of replacement one-over-one, double hung aluminum frame sash windows on the first story. Two redesigned first floor windows towards the rear of the dwelling are approximately 3/4 the height of the originals (Plate 15). Three bays are evident on the second story front façade, while four bays exist along the sides of the dwelling. The two-over-two double hung sash windows in the second story and the four-light windows in the gable peaks all appear to be the original windows. During the winter, storm windows cover most of the windows on a temporary basis.

The rear block of the dwelling adjoins a hipped roof porch. The wraparound rear porch is enclosed with modern additions on both sides and rests on a cinder block foundation. Except for most of the rear porch, the T-plan is now enclosed. The alterations were already evident in 1987 when John Milner Associates, Inc. (JMA) first evaluated the property as part of a previous federal undertaking. Despite alterations and without National Register evaluation form being filled out, the SHPO later recommended and agreed that the property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 as part of the West Rehoboth Beach Multiple Property nomination.

According to the 1987 JMA assessment and now this 2006 re-assessment, all the first floor windows have since been replaced as well as the size orientation of the two rear windows under the porch have been altered (Plate 15). In 1987 and in 2006, one of the bay windows is missing on the west side of the dwelling (i.e. covered over). This is also evident in the second story bay towards the rear of the dwelling.



The main front door is obscure from a modern storm door, so it is uncertain whether or not the original door was present or existed in 1987. Access and visibility could not be properly obtained. The rear entrance door/bay (i.e. really now the front door with re-orientation) is part of the modern enclosure of the rear porch towards the west.

The house is sheathed in cement-asbestos siding, which is in poor condition with exposure of modern insulation. This same

Plate 15 Window Alterations

sheathing was also evident in 1987. Two corbelled interior end chimneys project from either end of the roof ridge of the main block. A third exterior chimney with extensive repair to the top portion is centered on the southeastern elevation of the rear block.

Since 1987, the property contains several recently constructed modern storage buildings, as well as a modular home with attached wood-framed deck. A chain link fence surrounds the property on three sides. Ms. Marsh now resides in an adjacent modular home (modern) and the main dwelling has been converted into a rental unit.

### *Evaluation*

This late nineteenth-century, I-house constructed as a T-plan c. 1870 (plates 14, and 14A) is representative of a cross gabled roof with Victorian detailed rafters. John Milner Associates (JMA) evaluated the dwelling in 1987 and recommended it eligible for the National Register (as part of a multiple property evaluation. (Tidlow, et al. 1987:289)

JMA's recommendation lists the dwelling as the earliest farmhouse in West Rehoboth (1870), and its association with Rhodes Thompson. Rhodes Thompson was a Rehoboth Beach farmer listed in the 1879 State Directory. It was evaluated and later recommend eligible by the SHPO in 1988 as a remaining architectural property type with ties and association to the early agricultural community in Rehoboth Beach. Although the dwelling or property was never prepared with an individual National Register nomination form, it is considered as an individual contributing element of the West Rehoboth Multiple Property Area since 1988 by the SHPO.

In terms of former agricultural properties or dwellings simply dating from the mid to late nineteenth century still remaining with the Rehoboth Beach Area, the Charles E. Marsh House is not alone. In fall of 2006 the Delaware Department of Transportation's (DelDOT) Environmental Studies Section identified several mid to late nineteenth-century farmhouses or I-houses still remaining in the Rehoboth Beach area that would equally or better match the same association and architectural elements of an early, pre-resort dwellings in the Rehoboth Beach area. DelDOT found similar or better examples that would dispute the inference that the Charles E. Marsh House is the rare and one of the surviving examples of an architectural I-house with past associated ties to agriculture in the Rehoboth Beach Community. Other examples dating from the same time era do exist, which would not make this the rare and the only surviving example in the immediate and surrounding area.

In addition to the Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) there are dwellings located at 165 Henlopen Street, 111 Fourth Street, 20386 Country Club Road, 18663 Munchy Branch Road, 415 Rehoboth Avenue, and dwelling off Wolf Neck Road. DelDOT also identified Rustic Acres located off Holland Glade Road as a remaining working dairy and agricultural property that is evident of a 5 bay I-house with ancillary lands and outbuildings in the northeast Rehoboth Beach area. Appendix II addresses and locates those similar examples.

From several examples still evident in the area and with one remaining working farm in the same area, the Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) is simply a collective example of an early vernacular I-house or pre-resort dwelling in the Rehoboth Beach area. It is not the only or

unquestionably the best remaining example of a late nineteenth-century. Nor is the Charles E. Marsh House unique to the area as a representative architectural example of a former agricultural property type. Other than the Rustic Acres property, none of the properties (including Charles E. Marsh House) can actually convey the any historic context theme of agriculture – i.e. since it no longer exists or can be conveyed. As a former agricultural property type, the Charles E. Marsh House's location, design, setting, feeling, association within a pre-resort atmosphere as a cannot be conveyed. Other than past records, no evidence suggests that this property should be specifically evaluated or considered under the historic context of agriculture or as a former agricultural complex. Because of the significant alterations to the property and the commercial and residential conversion land uses in the surrounding area, this property can only be considered worthy for its potential historic architecture under the relevant historic context.

Unless a significant event took place or a family/individual of exceptional importance resided in the dwelling during its period of significance, the remaining properties in the immediate Rehoboth Beach area, including the Charles E. Marsh House, should be historically evaluated upon individual architectural relevance under Criteria C and D (note: with exception of Rustic Acres which is still an operating farm/agricultural property type).

As far as background research is concerned with associated ties to the community, Joseph Thompson and Charles E. Marsh purchased the property (Tax Parcel 3-34-13.20-109) from the estate of Rhodes Thompson (deceased) at a public sale in 1895. (Deed: bk.121 pg. 550) Thompson is listed in the 1879 State Directory as a farmer in Rehoboth Beach. A search of deeds and local records has not associated Rhodes Thompson with any historical events or persons. Plus, it is unknown as to whether Thompson resided in the house or used it as a tenant house (Tidlow et al. 1987:205).

Because of its proximity, DelDOT Environmental Studies Section researched the possible correlation among the Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) within the African-American Community and the Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church (S-1085/9600).

As part of this effort, DelDOT staff spoke to Mr. and Mrs. Hurley Waples. They are long time congregants of the Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church and the West Rehoboth Community. They recalled the history of the church. A deed search for the church was also completed at the Sussex County, Delaware Deed Office.

According to deeds and the Waples, in April 1881 Elijah Burton donated a one-acre parcel adjacent to the old Rehoboth-Lewes Road for a church site and graveyard (Tax parcel 3-34-19.08-1300). Mr. & Mrs. Waples indicate through their church records that the church first organized in 1883 and the congregants held service in private homes and or met in nearby groves until 1884 when a building was completed. It was a one room frame structure called Little's Chapel. At a later date (unknown) the name was changed to Burton's Chapel Methodist-Episcopal Church. Also important to note is that the bodies from the colored section of the Rehoboth Presbyterian Church graveyard at Midway were exhumed and reentered in the Burton's Chapel graveyard.

In August 1884 Elijah Burton donated another acre adjacent to Church Street. From there, the church building was physically moved to the new location (3-34-13.20-1300; Deed: bk. 129, pg. 415). In 1899 the church was incorporated and the name was change to Mount Pleasant Methodist Church. In 1966, Mount Pleasant along with other predominantly African American Methodist churches would become United Methodist churches as part of the Peninsula Conference.

DelDOT's research of deeds, church history and interviews with community members did not find a correlation among the Marsh House, the African American community and Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church. Mrs. Marsh stated that any correlation among the church, the community and the Marsh family maybe traced to members of the African-American Community who may have worked for the family.

As far as any association of the Rhodes Thompson family with the greater agricultural community, the only documented research indicates that Rhodes Thompson was a Rehoboth Beach farmer listed in the 1879 State Directory. Thus, the only historic association is that Rhoads Thompson was a farmer using the property (i.e. Charles E. Marsh House) as a personal residence or as a tenant house. From the limited research known, this is not credible information as a National Register qualifier, nor should have been in 1987/88. Rhodes Thompson was not known to be an important member of the community. He once owned the property and died. Charles E. Marsh purchased the property at a public estate sale in 1895 (Deed: bk.121 pg. 550). As Charles E. Marsh was known to have other landholding with dwellings (S-1104, S1105, S1107) and a main farmhouse (S-1075), it is likely that the Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) could have served as temporary occupancy then as tenant or extended family occupancy during the very late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Neither Rhodes Thompson nor Charles E. Marsh as individual's or as a family seem to be important for National Register consideration. Even with the next family generation still owing and occupying the premises, no specific or credible historic or individual person/family information is known to exist that would be significant under the National Register.

Thus, based on all the above information, the property is not recommend eligible either under Criteria A or B.

The Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) should only be evaluated under the historic contexts of architecture (i.e. Criteria C or D). This is the only applicable criterion evident to evaluate the property under. In 1987 and confirmed by SHPO in 1988, the property seemed to be recommended eligible under Criteria C. However, this was not specifically indicated in any report, agency correspondence, nor does a National Register Nomination Form reflect that assessment. However, it is of DelDOT's professional opinion that this property is no longer eligible (or considered eligible) under Criteria C. Past inferences were over stated or interpreted in a different manner. Regardless of overstatements or interpretations, architecturally changes in the property have occurred since 1988.

Of individual architectural merit, the Charles E. Marsh House lacks significance and integrity both in the 1987 write-up and presently.

Architecturally, other mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century vernacular I-houses are evident in the immediate Rehoboth Beach area. Therefore, it is of DeIDOT's opinion that previous significance determined by SHPO had been overstated in 1988 by classifying the Charles E. Marsh House as the "earliest and best remaining architectural property type with ties and association to the early agricultural, pre-resort, community in west Rehoboth Beach".

Indeed, this property, like many others, represents the pre-resort, agricultural and architectural period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Rehoboth Beach. However, with better or equal examples still evident, property is not significant as the best surviving architectural example of its period in the west Rehoboth Beach area as indicated by the SHPO in 1988. Moreover, the only association applied to the property is that the former property owners were farmers.

Historically, the property contained a sizable lot of land, once used for agricultural purposes. The agricultural setting is not evident. National Register integrity of location, setting and feeling has been compromised with the subdivision of the land into smaller, mixed-use properties, used for both residential and commercial. A modern dwelling and storage sheds have been built immediately adjacent or in front of the house. Beyond the Mount Pleasant Methodist Church situated near the north end of the property, modern commercial buildings or condominiums surround the property along Rehoboth Avenue and Church Street. The property's integrity of feeling and association as a former agricultural farm was lost with the cessation of its agricultural use. Further, all the former outbuildings as illustrated on Sanborn maps for 1922 and (Figure 11 and Figure 13) have been removed.

The I-house dwelling as a stand-alone farmhouse no longer eligible for listing in the National Register under Criteria C due to the many changes to the dwelling. Beyond the physical and land use alterations, the reorientation of the facade from Church Street to Rehoboth Avenue reduces the status symbol of the dwelling.

As Jakle, et al. indicated (1989), during the mid to late nineteenth century, the I-house symbolized affluence born of the land. The strength of the form as a status symbol was maximized when the façade faced the public road projecting an impressive front elevation. This association of the house with prosperity and respectability was common among farmers and businessman and professionals in villages and towns. Much of the rural affluence could be attributed to the rise of commercial agriculture associated with the development of regional railroad networks and regional markets (Jakle, et al. 1989:121). Charles E. Marsh House cannot convey this aspect. The front of the property has been re-orientated from the main road. The front façade of the property from Church Street is also not viable due to a chain link fence with thick evergreens that shield the front of the property from the road. Modern storage buildings and an outdoor shower also block the front façade (Plate 15A).



As a reflective agricultural property type that cannot be conveyed, remaining I-houses within the Rehoboth Beach area are vernacular in form and their style is not unique (See Appendix II). Architecturally, the Charles E. Marsh House (S-

Plate 15A Frontal View from Church Street

1088) is not a property individually worthy of National Register credibility under Criteria C. Design, materials, and craftsmanship are plain. The dwelling has not only been altered architecturally, but also in attempts to convey itself as simple vernacular I-house.

According to McAlester and McAlester, I-houses of the Victorian era spanned from the 1870's to the early twentieth century and is typically defined by the presence of characteristic decorative detailing. Details are usually, of either Italianate or Queen Anne design, and occasionally Gothic Revival. The areas of detailing tended to be in or around the porch and cornice areas. The side gable, two story subtypes are typically former I-houses in which Victorian detailing has been added. Centered, cross-gabled subtypes are common also. These houses make strong stylistic statements and are commonly treated as a distinctive style house (McAlester and McAlester, 1997: 309-310).

Other than a simple centered cross gable along the roof, the Charles E. Marsh House, architecturally, suggests none of the above characteristics. In fact, the full front porch was removed and replaced sometime after 1931 (see Sandborn 1931 map, Figure 11), while the rear T-shaped porch has also been enclosed with modern additions after 1931. Over half the original windows are modern replacements and various bay spacing has been altered. Entrance doors, whether or not they are original, are covered over by modern storm doors. Wood sheathing, if still present, is covered over with cement asbestos shingles and modern insulation. Only rafter tails are evident. With modern storage buildings, an outdoor shower as part of the front façade, and a modular home present on the same lot, this further eradicates the possibility of the property eligible under Criteria C as a former agricultural property type.

In terms of alterations, a full front porch at the facade gable entrance has been replaced with a front-gabled-hood (see Sanborn, 1922 and 1931 under Figures 11 and 13 versus that of plate 15A). Enclosure of the rear porch at both east and west ends has also occurred. Although the alterations were known and evident in 1988, no other form changes to the main house has since occurred. However, it is of DelDOT's opinion that those alterations had not been fully elaborated or considered in 1987 architectural assessment. They were not brought to the SHPO's attention in the previous report to make a proper eligibility assessment under Criteria C.

Since 1988, all the first floor windows were replaced and two windows on the south side (under the remaining rear porch) were reduced in framing or sash size. A large section of the rear hipped roof wraparound porch was enclosed and stands on a concrete foundation. Bricks were replaced in the top portion of an exterior chimney centered on the southeastern elevation of the rear block. A shed-roof outdoors shower has been constructed on the north west side of the façade. Historically, the dwelling was probably sheathed in horizontal, wood clapboard. It has been completely resided in cement asbestos shingles.

As such, the Charles E. Marsh House is not known to be the work of a master, nor does it possess high artistic values. Over the years, its architectural integrity has diminished. The context under which the property was evaluated in 1988 has been lost. The architectural changes have resulted in an architectural type that is no different from other examples of an I-house with Victorian detailing in the Rehoboth Beach area.

In sum, with such documented alterations previously noted/photographed in 1987 and with changes since then, the Charles E. March House is no longer recommended eligible under Criteria C, or a part of the West Rehoboth Multiple Property Area.

Of the 1987 JMA effort and SHPO review in 1988, one small district, two early 20<sup>th</sup> century resort complexes, and six individual properties were recommended eligible. The one small district (Washington Heights HD/S-8162) is greatly reduced in size due to demolition and new development. Neither the two early 20<sup>th</sup> century resort complexes exist in their location due to re-development. Of the six individual or multiple resource nominations, one property, Vincent R. Wolf House/S-1081, has been removed. Two other properties, Janice P. Lewis House/S-1077 and Helen F. Walker House/S-8018, have been so severely altered and renovated that they are no longer recommended eligible in the JMA draft 2005 architectural investigation (review is still pending). Likewise, with changes the Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church/S-1085/9600 in the current JMA 2005 architectural draft report that this individual property is no longer recommend eligible (review is still pending). The Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) is the sixth individual cultural resource recommended and found eligible in 1987/88.

As a future attachment to the JMA draft 2005 architectural investigation, DelDOT qualified staff is specifically focusing on the individual eligibility status of the Charles E. Marsh House. Taken as a whole, the Charles E. Marsh House (S-1088) is no longer recommended eligible under Criteria C.

Under Criteria D, the Charles E. Marsh House is of common construction building materials and construction techniques. This information is well documented and would not likely possess new information to deem the property eligible or potentially eligible under Criteria D. However, according to the Sandborn Maps, former outbuildings did exist towards the rear of the property. Although much of the lands may be disturbed by modern activities, a potential may exist for historic archaeology. This assessment would have to be later determined or coordinated by a qualified archaeologist to see where approximately former buildings existed and their expected results should redevelopment of the property occur later in time.