HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

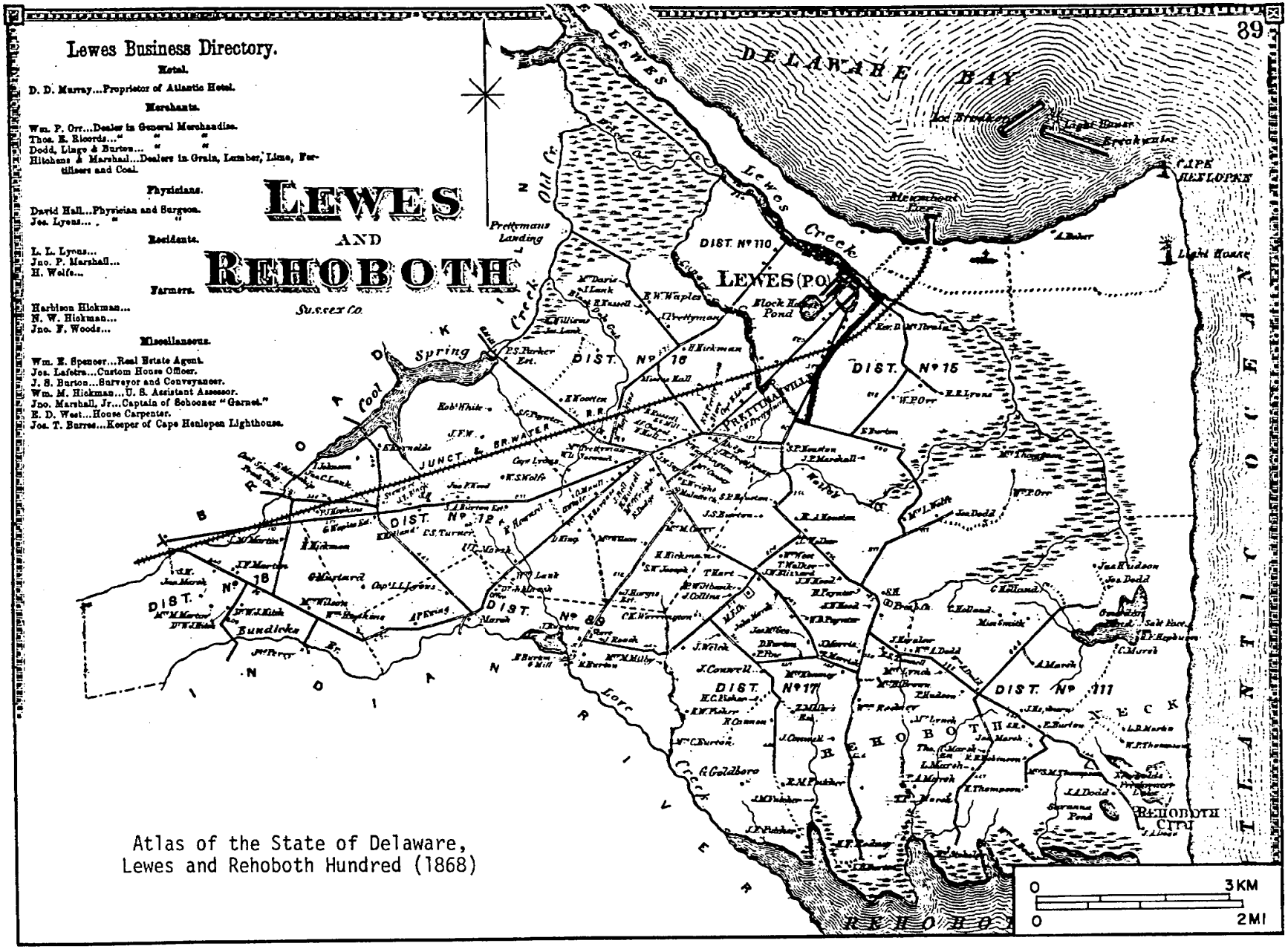
Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred is located in the southern section of Sussex County, Delaware. White settlers came into this area when Dutch traders established trade relations with the Indians in the early seventeenth century (Scharf 1888:1221). Through the influence of the traders, the West Indian Company purchased the land from the Indians in 1658. The English, however, claimed the land by virtue of Hudson's discovery in 1609. The Dutch regained control for one year before the English established permanent control in 1674. In 1682 William Penn received the land from the Duke of York.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Lewes was the only town of any significant size in Sussex County. Lewes became important as a port town because of its location on the Delaware Bay. Other Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred towns and villages did not develop significantly until construction of the railroad in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. As can be seen in Figure 2, the Hundred contained only three towns important enough to be shown on the 1868 map: Lewes, Prettymanville, and Rehoboth City. The rest of the Hundred remained rural farmland.

Because the chief market for many of Delaware's products was located abroad in the eighteenth century, land located near navigable water was the most valuable (Munroe X979:59). It was also the only land worth developing into real towns since it was difficult for settlers to travel the poorly maintained roads.

Through the eighteenth century, blacks were the largest minority group in the state (Munroe 1979:57). The black population had grown as immigrants arrived from Maryland, as slaves were brought into the state by their masters, and through the importation of additional slaves. In the middle of the eighteenth century, one-fifth of the population of the state was slave (Munroe 1979:96). By 1790, however, one-third of the black population was free, but as Munroe has suggested, that freedom would have been granted relatively recently (Munroe 1979:96). Emancipation of slaves had begun prior to the Revolution and continued during the early federal period as the result of political and religious concerns (Munroe 1979:57). Many of the important political offices in the state were held by individuals of the Quaker faith and, since this religious sect prohibited the holding of slaves, emancipation became more and more widespread (Munroe 1979:58). Importation of slaves was actually outlawed in 1776 when Delawareans wrote their first state constitution (Munroe 1979:57).

As in other southern states, slavery was an important cultural institution because agriculture formed the basis of Delaware's economy in the eighteenth century (Munroe 1979:58), and most of



Atlas of the State of Delaware,
Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred (1868)

Figure 2

the labor needed for agriculture was supplied by slaves or free blacks (Hancock 1976:64). Sussex County, of the three Delaware counties, actually had the largest number of slaves, which may be due to the longer growing season in this part of the state (Munroe 1979:97).

Although many blacks were free men, whites maintained all political control in Delaware in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1792 when the original state constitution was rewritten, voters were defined as white males who paid taxes (Munroe 1979:82-83). This measure excluded all blacks. As abolitionism became a national concern and a major political issue in the nineteenth century, Delaware reacted by passing statutes specifically limiting the rights of all blacks, free or slave (Munroe 1979:98). Emancipation continued during this period, however, as the number of slaves declined drastically while the number of free blacks rose in the first quarter of the nineteenth century (Munroe 1979:99). Slavery was gradually ending, although it continued to exist legally (Munroe 1979:101).

The Methodist religion originated in England in the eighteenth century and arrived in Lewes, Delaware in 1739 through the preaching of George Whitefield (Munroe 1979:89-90). Other evangelists for this faith followed and established congregations and churches in the areas not served by the Anglican Church (Munroe 1979:91). Methodism was very successful in Delaware and Methodist preachers made special efforts to reach potential black congregants as well as white individuals (Munroe 1979:93). As a result of this special effort, most black churches organized in Delaware were under the auspices of the Methodist Church (Eckman 1955:124).

The economy of Delaware changed in the nineteenth century with the establishment of new manufacturers, and Sussex County had five iron manufacturers in 1810 (Munroe 1979:103-104). Construction of new roads occurred in New Castle County to facilitate the new industries, but Kent and Sussex Counties were still served by only a few, poorly maintained roads (Munroe 1979:107).

Because water routes were still the cheapest means of transportation, there was a movement in the period from 1812-1845 to build an extensive canal network (Hoffecker 1977:39). The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, linking the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays, was begun in 1824 and completed in 1829 (Hoffecker 1977:40). Improvements on Lewes Creek were planned as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the Delaware State Legislature incorporating a company for the expressed purpose of uniting Lewes Creek with Rehoboth Bay (Scharf 1888:1218). Although the project did not become a reality at that time, the plan was not abandoned.

Construction of the railroad into the southern section of Delaware opened up new markets for farmers' crops in the mid-nineteenth century (Munroe 1979:128). Truck crops, such as peaches, became profitable crops for Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred farmers (Munroe 1979:129).

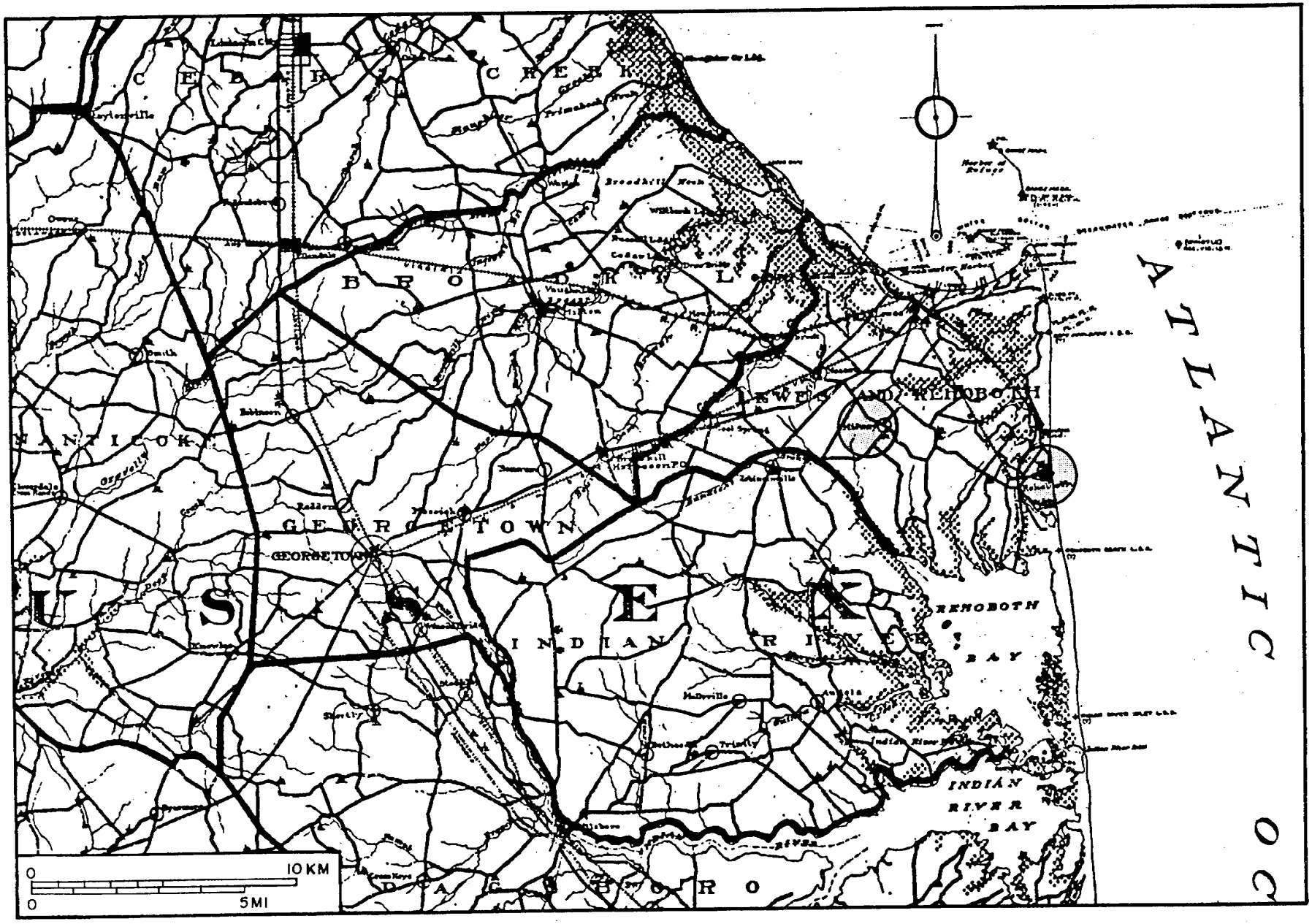
Because farmers were dependent on water transportation to get their crops to market, the most valuable and most developed farmland in the early nineteenth century remained that which was reasonably close to Lewes. Only when the Junction and Breakwater Railroad was constructed to Lewes in 1869, and then into Rehoboth in 1878, did outlying areas begin to be heavily farmed (Hancock 1976:89). With the construction of the state highway system into southern Delaware in 1925, still more land became viable for commercial farming (Beach 1984:15).

Delaware remained a slave state until 1865 when the Thirteenth Amendment was passed by the federal government (Munroe 1979:140). At that time, slavery existed only in Delaware, Kentucky and the Indian Territory of Oklahoma. In fact, the Democratic Delaware legislature rejected the Fourteenth (Civil Rights) and Fifteenth (Freedom to Vote) Amendments as well (Munroe 1979:145). Sussex County remained loyal to the Democratic party until 1888, and as Munroe has suggested, some of the support for this party was due to the success of the Democrats in preventing the black population from voting (Munroe 1979:148).

The Democratic legislature was able to prevent blacks from voting through the Assessment and Collection laws passed in 1873 (Munroe 1979:152). These laws made it the responsibility of the individual resident to see that his name was on the assessment lists for the county tax and to see that his tax was paid. Only by paying the tax was the individual eligible to vote. Because local officials were no longer liable to persecution because of omissions from the assessment list, they could neglect undesirable voters, such as blacks and Republicans (Munroe 1957:436). If an undesirable was assessed and tried to pay his tax, he often found it difficult to find the tax collector "in."

In 1880 the Republicans finally won a majority in the legislature and ended disenfranchisement of Delaware blacks (Munroe 1957:437). The Delaware state legislature, however, did not ratify the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments until 1901.

As late as the 1880s, the southern area of Sussex County, including Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred, remained very rural. A few small villages had been established, including Midway which is located just south of the center of the project area (Figure 3).



Map of the State of Delaware (1910)

Figure 3

In the late nineteenth century the railroad expanded its operations in Sussex County (Munroe 1979:161). Most southern Delaware towns that developed in the mid-to-late nineteenth century were located near railroad depots. When the Junction and Breakwater Railroad was completed into Lewes in 1869, Nassau and Cool Springs became new depots and, subsequently, new towns (Figure 3). Construction of the remaining few miles to Rehoboth Beach required an additional nine years.

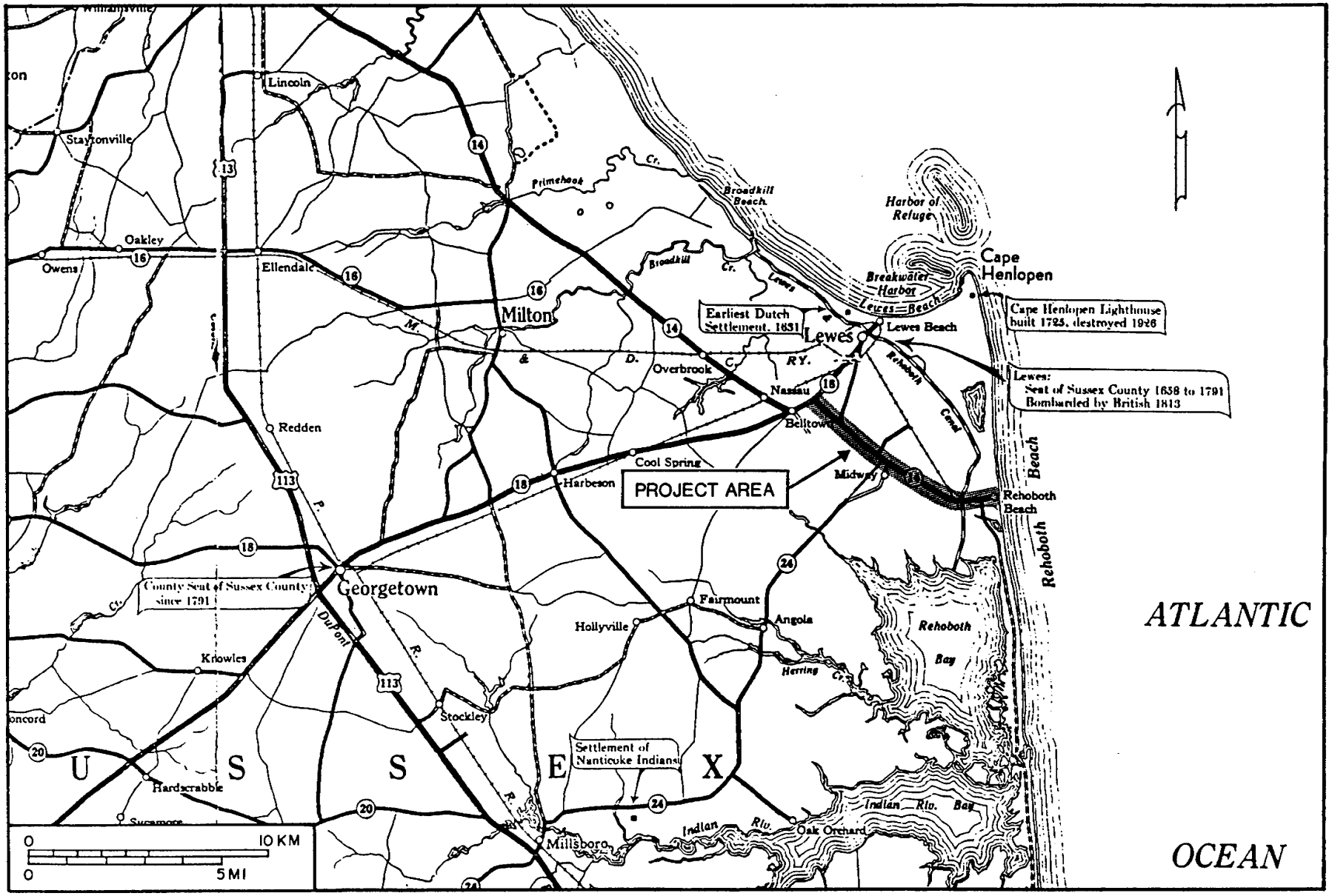
With the expansion of the railroad, other sections of Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred could be profitably farmed, and production grew to the point where commercial canning became a viable industry. During the late nineteenth century canneries were established in most southern Delaware towns, including Lewes and Rehoboth (Munroe 1979:164).

The town of Rehoboth Beach is located on a site purchased by the Rehoboth Association in 1872 for the purpose of establishing a resort with religious influences (Scharf 1888:1219). A yearly camp meeting was held on the site by the Methodist Church until 1881. The town started to develop into a resort community during the 1870s when summer hotels and cottages were erected on lots sold by the Association. But it was not until Route 1 was completed that the community began to grow significantly in popularity (Munroe 1979:204).

Invention of the automobile led to the construction of a new highway system throughout southern Delaware with many new roads constructed in the first quarter of the twentieth century (Munroe 1979:203; Mack 1947:537-544). This new system provided farmers with easier access to large urban markets and significantly changed the types of products produced for market. Route 1, or Route 14 as it was called for much of the twentieth century, became a concrete road connecting Georgetown and Rehoboth Beach in 1925 (Beach 1984:15). The 1934 Official Road Map of the State of Delaware showed Route 14 (Route 1) after it had been paved and straightened (Figure 4).

With the new highway system came changes in residential patterns. The most valuable land became that readily accessible to a highway (Munroe 1979:204; Hoffecker 1977:56). The resort communities, such as Rehoboth Beach, grew rapidly when connected to urban areas by usable roads, and the basis of the Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred economy after 1925 became a combination of agriculture and tourist-related industry.

Herman and Siders (1986) have identified the predominant house types for Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred for several historical periods. The first period, 1830-1880, is characterized by two-story, hall-parlor or center-passage, single pile dwellings (Herman and Siders 1986:87). During the period 1880-1940, the predominant types were two-story, three or five bay, single pile



Official Road Map of the State of Delaware (1934)

Figure 4

houses and bungalows (Herman and Siders 1986:93, 96). In many cases these houses were erected without cellars on masonry piers (Herman 1987b:181). The lack of cellars and the presence of insubstantial foundations have resulted in buildings that are relatively easy to move to new sites. This has been a common phenomenon in Lewes and Rehoboth Hundred for years. As a result, a number of houses within the project area have been moved in recent memory (Marshall 1987; Marsh 1988). Concurrently, much new commercial development has occurred, encroaching upon the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century agricultural landscape.