CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

This chapter moves from the wider picture to focus more specifically on the history of the tavern property itself. This is reconstructed from the property deeds and property inventories stored in the Delaware State Archives: dry and sometimes confusing legal documents that give us snapshots in time of what was happening on and around the property.

Isaac Wilcox and James Harvey preceded John Tweed as innkeepers at the tavern, but after he took it over in 1804 its peculiar name of Mudfort was replaced by his own. He ran the tavern for almost 20 years, and other members of his family remained associated with it until 1831. After that it seems to have ceased to be a tavern. For much of the later 1800s it was in the hands of the Baldwin family. In the early 1930s it came into the ownership of the Giacomelli family. Members of the family who grew up in the house are still living in the area, and have provided much interesting information about life there in the 1930s, 40s and 50s: a time of hard work farming and growing mushrooms, and a time when the small log house first acquired some additions to make space for a growing family.

One unexpected result of the documentary research was clear evidence that Limestone Road did not run on its present alignment during the first decade of the 19th century. The evidence is puzzling as it implies that the tavern was built some distance away from the road, which makes little sense for a tavern. When Valley Road was built in 1807-8, it too was on a different alignment to its present one, running north of the tavern instead of south of it as it does now.

A. THE TWEED ERA

Documentation for the property that was to be Tweed's Tavern effectively begins on April 3, 1799. Stephen Foulk of Mill Creek Hundred owned a hundred acres when he died on that date. This hundred acre property was located on Limestone Road, in the Delaware piedmont, and it contained two residences, or "messuages," one of which was a log tavern that had been for several years operated by Isaac Wilcox (New Castle County Orphans Court Records I-1:109, New Castle County Orphans Court Case File).

It was heavy clay ground, near the lime kilns along the Pennsylvania line, on the busy route from New Garden Township, Chester County, down to the merchant mills and seaport villages of Stanton and Newport in Delaware.

Foulk's widow and brother divided the property into three parts and asked the Orphans Court for permission to sell the tracts. The tavern, with a little more than ten and three quarter acres, was sold to James Harvey for $905. It was the first part of the property to be sold at auction, on September 30, 1800 (New Castle County Deed Book Y-2).

Harvey was a cooper from Whitpain Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Coopers were an essential part of the milling industry, since flour was shipped in barrels. When a shipload of flour sailed out the Christina, it was also a shipload of barrels. There were flour mills nearby, but Harvey was apparently more interested in selling other grain products. He replaced Wilcox on the tavern license and was an "innkeeper" by the time he sold the tavern to John Tweed in 1802 (New Castle County Tavern Petitions 1802).

Tweed, or "Tweedy," was identified as a house carpenter of Bart Township, Lancaster County, part of the hinterland served by Limestone Road. He may well have been aware of the economic opportunities available to tavern keepers on the roads leading from his home county to the Christina River. The purchase price was $1,733.33; Harvey had nearly doubled his money. For a time in 1803 Samuel Johnston held the license, but Tweed applied in his own name at the May term of Court in 1804. The petition was countersigned by some of the hundred's most influential citizens, including mill owners and innkeepers (Bowers 1986:57, New Castle County Deed Book Y-2:260).

Deeds of this time show that the road system at that time was somewhat different from the present alignments. Joseph Phillips, a blacksmith, bought 31 acres along Limestone Road at the end of January 1801. He already owned land to the west of the Foulk farm. Samuel Lindsay bought the mansion house with 64 acres on the south end of the tract.

Phillips almost immediately sold two and a half acres of his tract, along Limestone Road, to another blacksmith, Ezekiel Reece (Rice, Reese) (New Castle County Deed Book P-3:339).

Deeds for these transactions all show the Limestone Road passing north of the site in an east-west direction, about 500 feet from the building now known as Tweed's Tavern, but both properties had road frontage. At some unknown time within the next few years, Limestone Road would be relocated to its present course along the east side of these properties. The 1804 road plot (Figure 3.1) may imply that this had already happened by this date, as it shows a stream crossing Limestone Road perpendicular to it, adjacent to the "new tavern called Mudfort Tavern", just as it does today (New Castle County road papers). This is the only document that identifies the property as "Mudfort," which is unexplained. The name "Mudford" is both a family name and a place name in England, and there is a place called Mudford in Canada today.

In August of 1804, Tweed, now the innkeeper, expanded his property by purchasing from Phillips 23.5 acres of the land the latter had bought from the Foulks (Figure 3.2). The purchase price, $752, indicates that the new tract probably was "unimproved" land, at least without buildings. The Tweed property was now more than 34 acres. This 34-acre tract would remain together during the rest of the nineteenth century (New Castle County Deed Book B-3:518 and New Castle County Tavern Petition 1804).

Tweed financed the purchase with a $1,200 mortgage on both parcels to Jane McKinley, a Wilmington widow. The mortgage called for Tweed to pay back $600 by the first of August next following. The mortgage was not satisfied for another thirty years, when Mrs. McKinley's executor signed the release (New Castle County Deed Book B-3:466).

The Mill Creek Hundred tax assessment of 1804 describes Tweed's ten-acre tract as containing a log house, kitchen and stable, with six acres "improved." Phillips was credited with 91 acres total, with a log house and log barn, but no mention of a blacksmith shop. Ezekiel Reece, who owned the small lot next

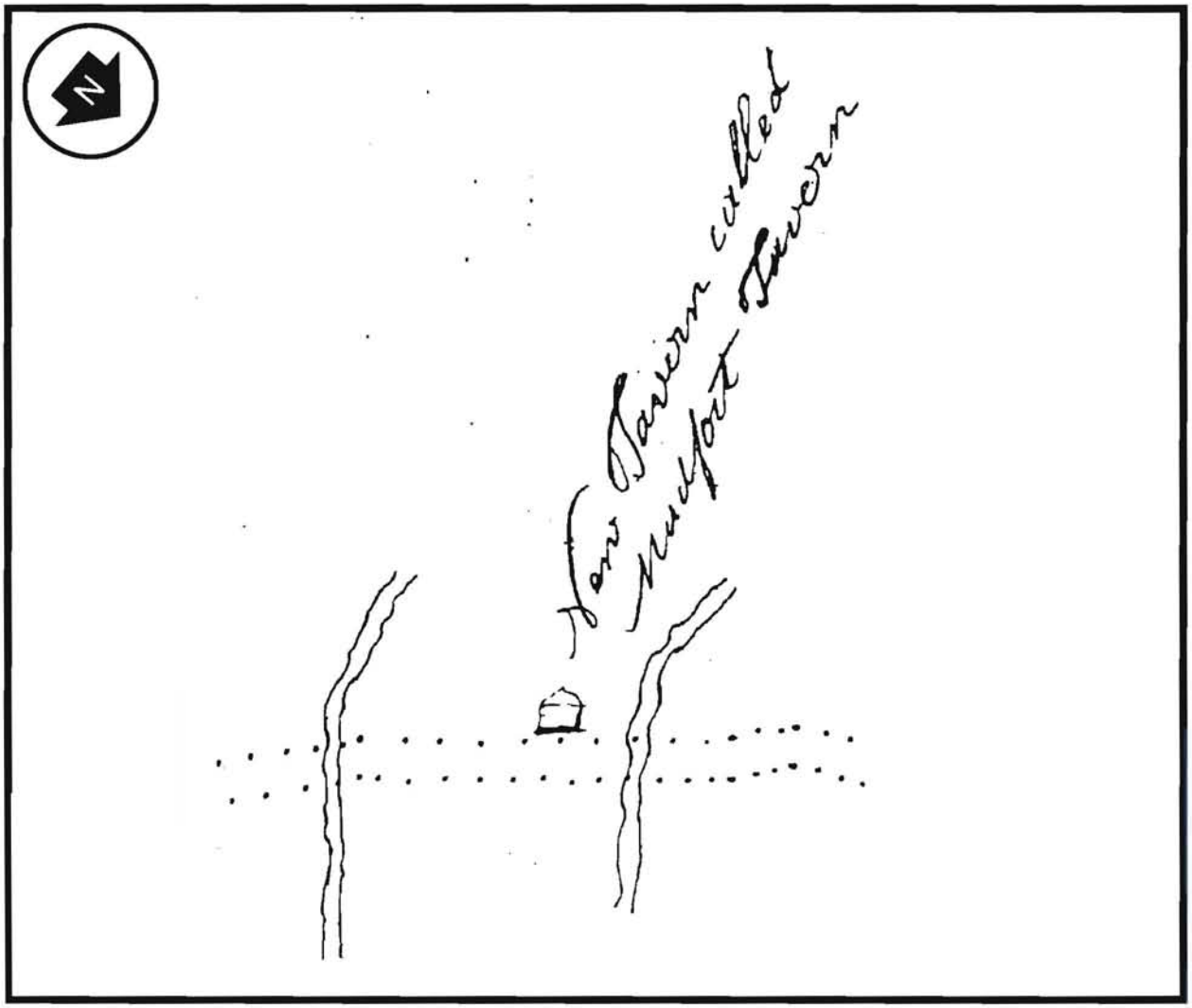

Figure 3.1 Road Plot Dated May 30, 1804, Showing the "New" Mudfort Tavern (Source: New Castle County Road Papers). Dotted lines represent the road, with solid lines representing streams. Not to Scale.

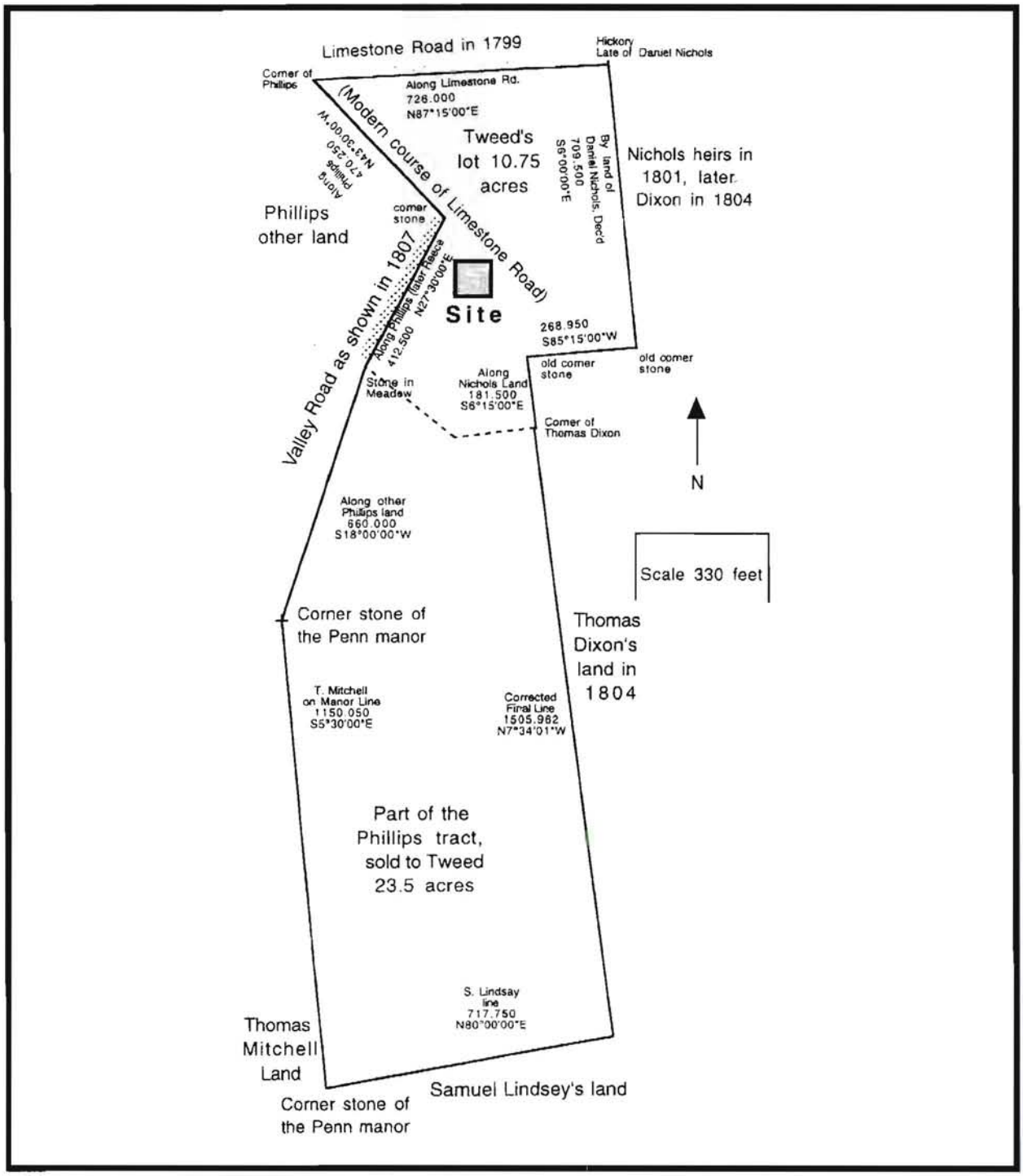

Figure 3.2. Deed Plot of the 34+ Acres Assembled by Tweed in 1804 fromTwo Parts of the Foulk Tract with Details Added (Source: New Castle County Deed Books Y-2/260 and B-3/518). Project Area Indicated.

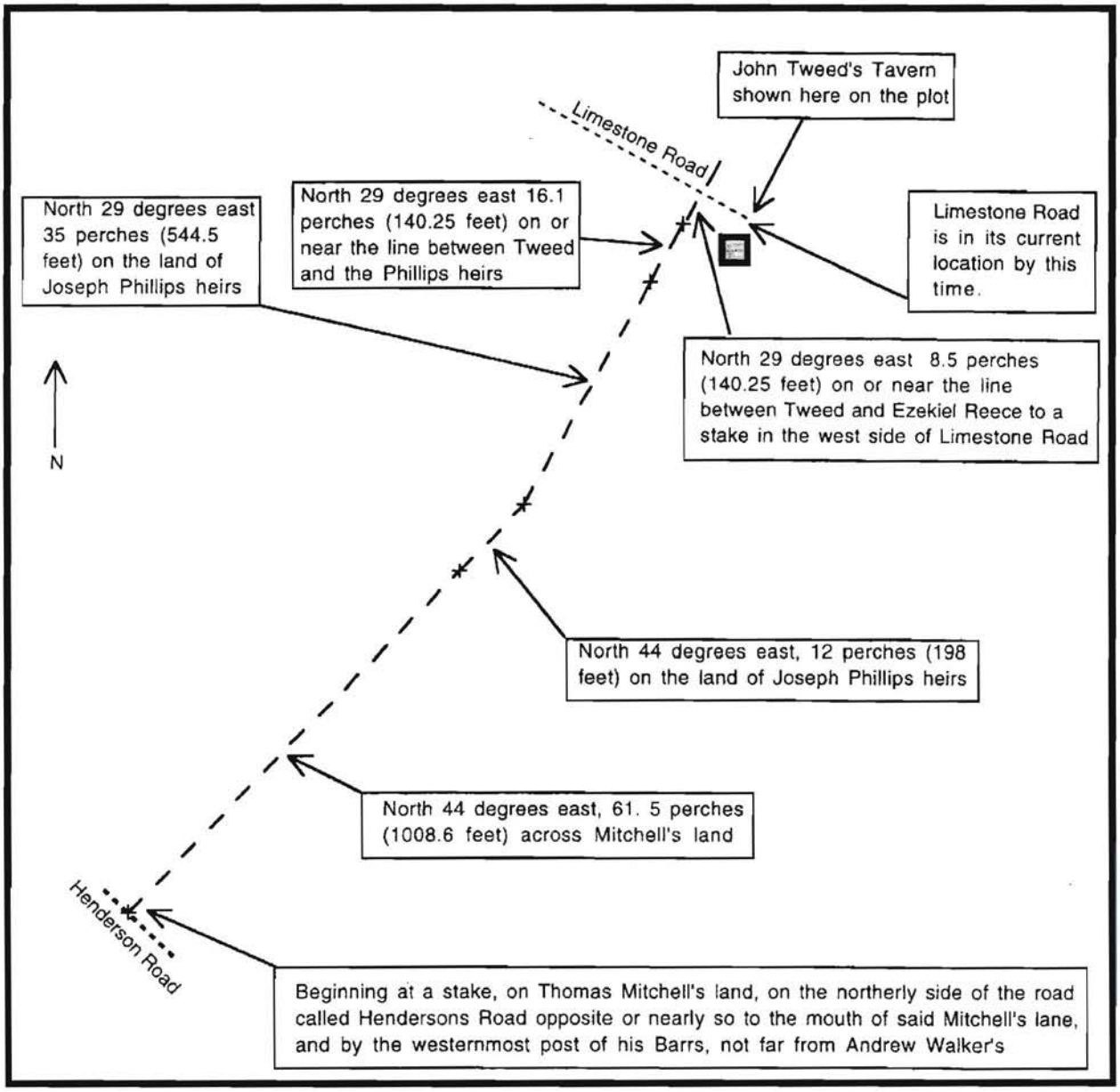

Figure 3.3. Sketch Map Detail of the 1807-1808 RoadLayout (Source: New Castle County Road Papers). Project Area Indicated.

door, was credited with 52 acres that included a log house and a log tenament. The term "tenament" apparently meant tenant house or servants' quarters.

In 1807 and 1808, a new road, now known as Valley Road, was laid out from Thomas Mitchell's land on Henderson Road to a place near the Hockessin meeting house. This road's plot is particularly revealing about the tavern locality. Limestone Road was by then in its present location (Figure 3.3). The new road passed along the property line between Tweed and Reece's two and a half acres, apparently running on the northwest side of the tavern rather than on the southeast side as it was later to do.

The realignment of Limestone Road is not documented in the county records, but it must have occurred sometime between 1799 when Foulk died, and 1807, when Valley Road was laid out; the survey at that time showed Limestone Road in its present location, and the new road running between Tweed and Reece.

Tweed evidently anticipated the traffic change that would come with opening of the new turnpike to Pennsylvania. In 1809, he bought 15.5 acres of land along the new Newport-Gap Pike at the state line. The purchase price was $464.22, which probably was speculative (New Castle County Deed Book I-3:39) .

In 1814, Ezekiel Reece sold his smaller parcel to Tweed, but it evidently was never integrated into the rest of Tweed's property, even though it was next door. The deed description demonstrates that Limestone Road had been moved to its present course by this time (New Castle County Deed Book N-3:537).

Reece was about to move away. He took back a purchase-money mortgage for the lot. Tweed evidently was not married at the time, for he executed the mortgage without a wife's counter signature. By 1824, Reece was resident of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, when he appointed William M. K. Ball to be his attorney. Ball recorded a satisfaction of the mortgage (New Castle County Deed Books N-3:368, and O-3:282).

The 1816 assessment described Tweed's holding as 36 acres, which reflected the addition of the two and a half acre tract from Reece. The property was "improved with one large log dwelling & cookery, frame barn & stables." The assessment also noted a slave and livestock. The former Reece lot evidently was vacant of structures at the time (New Castle County Tax Assessment 1816).

The collapse of Tweed's fortunes came in 1823, when the Farmer's Bank and other creditors forced a sheriff's sale (New Castle Deed Book B-4:137). One outcome of the court proceedings was a detailed inventory of the Tweed estate. Curiously enough, no liquors are listed in the inventory, and there are only six chairs and three beds, but there are two dining tables.

Tweed's non-tavern business interests are suggested by reference to a lime kiln with a substantial supply of firewood, three oxen, and a four-horse wagon. Buildings include a kitchen, a barn, a shed, a tool house, and an office in addition to the house. This suggests that at this time tavern keeping was only one of Tweed's sources of income

He apparently died around the same time as the foreclosure, for in some documents he is called "late" of Mill Creek Hundred. The sheriff's deed described Tweed's estate as the 36 acres and half interest in 100 acres adjacent.

Tweed's creditors were proceeding against him in both Supreme Court and Common Pleas. A few days after the Common Pleas appraisers did their work, the Supreme Court moved to authorize a sheriff's sale on behalf of the bank.

Joseph Roman bought the properties, except the Reece tract, at the sheriff's auction for $1,335. With all the mortgages satisfied, Roman had a clear title to the three tracts surrounding Tweed's tavern lot. Reece's attorney-in-fact recorded a satisfaction of the Reece purchase-money mortgage of 1814, and Mrs. McKinley's executor recorded a satisfaction of the earlier mortgage whereby Tweed had bought the additional open ground (New Castle County Deed Books B-3:466 and B-4:137).

The date of John Tweed's death is uncertain, but the records reflect a tragic end. Curtis Tweed applied to the Court in June 1824 for a license to operate the old and well-known tavern that had "lately" been occupied by his father. But he did not yet own the tavern he was operating (New Castle County Tavern Petition 1824).

John's son Robert filed a petition in Orphans Court in 1830 in which he stated that John Tweed had no real estate but a property in Pennsylvania worth a dollar a year in income. Joseph Roman, who now had clear title to all three of John Tweed's parcels, was a Pennsylvania resident, but he had a shop just inside Delaware on the Limestone Road. In January 1825, he and his wife conveyed most of the 36-acre tract to Tweed's widow, Elizabeth, and his sons Curtis and James. Elizabeth conveyed her share to the sons in 1830 (New Castle County Deed Book I-4:44).

Roman conveyed the smaller Reece tract of two and a fraction acres to Levi Ament in 1825. It was described as containing a messuage, which means that there was a house, which must have been built after 1816. Ament sold the property to Ross Dixon and Levi Talley. This interior lot would never again be part of the former Tweed holding (New Castle Deed Books C-4:434 and M-4:422).

B. 1830 TO 1934

Talley bought Dixon's share and conveyed the lot in 1833 to Isaac Bracken, who thereupon conveyed it to Eleanor Lindsay, widow of Samuel, who had bought and farmed the 63-acre southern part of the Foulk tract. She died in 1846, and her heirs sold the lot to George Klair in 1863 (New Castle Deed Books R-4:411, 413 and R-7:397).

Ezekiel Reece's main tract, 66 acres, had been occupied and then purchased by Andrew Walker, who sold half to Curtis and James Tweed, who thereby shouldered even more debt (New Castle County Deed Book K-4:354).

The debt-burdened Tweed brothers were forced to sell both properties to Ross Dixon in 1831 (Figure 3.4). Curtis Tweed disappeared from the tavern license list thereafter, and Tweed family association with the property ended. This may also have been the end of the site's career as a tavern. Thenceforward, no owner of the property can be identified as a tavern licensee (New Castle County Deed Book M-4:420).

Ross Dixon died soon thereafter, and his executor conveyed the two former Tweed properties, totaling 67 acres, to Dr. Andrews Murphy on March 4, 1834. On March 25, Dr. Murphy promptly conveyed the property to Thomas Baldwin (New Castle County Deed Books R-4:371 and S-4:315). He is shown as the owner on the 1849 New Castle county map (Figure 3.5).

The 1852 assessment describes the real estate of Thomas Baldwin as 67 acres containing a log house and a frame barn. His will was probated December 8 of that year. Executors were his widow, Lydia, and his son-in-law George Klair (New Castle County Tax Assessment of 1852).

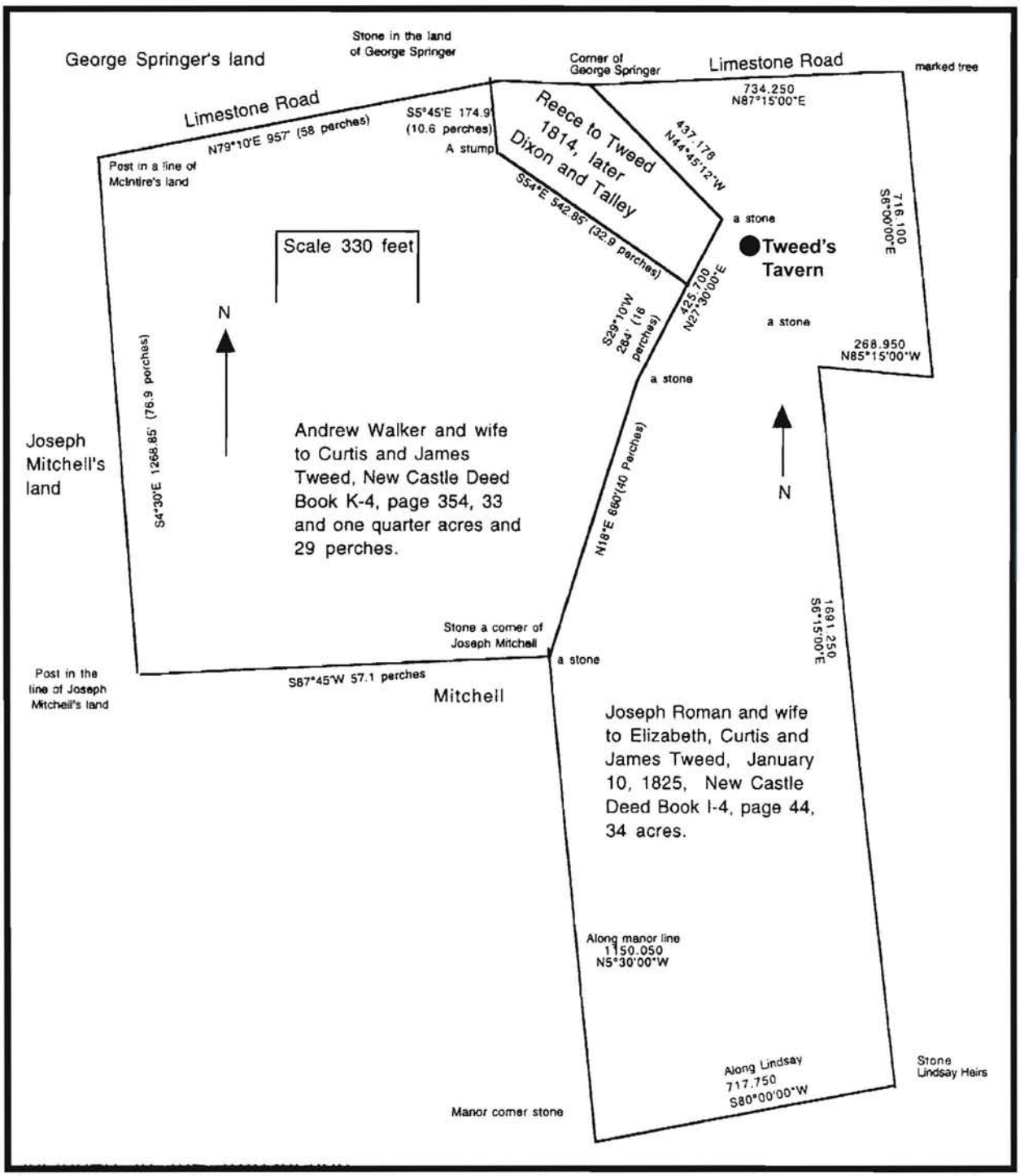

Figure 3.4. Deed Plot of Adjacent Tracts that Curtis and James Tweed Conveyed to Ross Dixon in 1831. (Source: New Castle County Deed Books K-4/354; I-4/44). Project Area Indicated. The property on the right is the property their father bought in two parcels. For another century, the properties would remain together in the same ownership but described separately. The middle parcel, 2.5 acres along Limestone Road, was not included in the transaction.

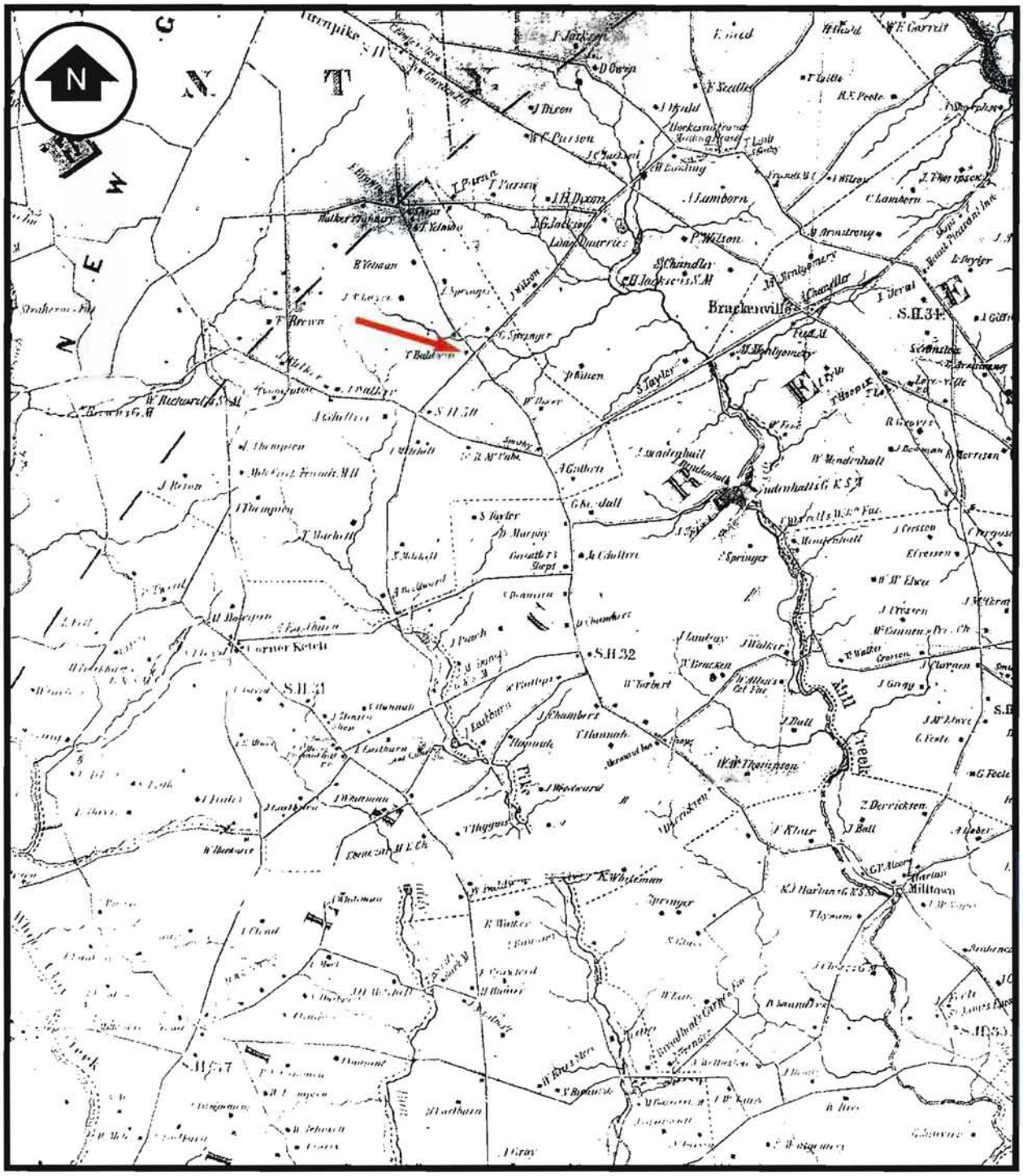

Figure 3.5. Rea, S.M. and J. Price. *Map of New Castle County, Delaware*. 1849. Scale: 1 Inch: 5000 Feet (Approximately). Project Area Indicated by Arrow.

Thomas Baldwin's estate inventory provides a detailed picture of the property a generation after the fall of John Tweed's fortunes. The inventory describes rocking chairs, books in bookcases, and other amenities that had not been there before. With more beds and the presence of beverages, it more closely resembles what one imagines should be the contents of a tavern, even though it was evidently no longer occupied by a tavernkeeper. This data underscores the considerable difficulty in identifying a tavern without specific documentary evidence.

George Klair bought the small lot next door from Mrs. Lindsay's heirs in 1863 and held it until 1874, when he sold it to Humphrey Lynch. Klair handled the Baldwin family's estates and other affairs until his death at the age of 100 in 1909. He lived down the road in a large masonry house on his main farm (New Castle County Deed Book R-7:397).

The farm fell to Klair's brother-in-law, Thomas L. J. Baldwin, who would stay there the rest of his days. Under the terms of his father's will, the estate was to be equally divided among the children on their mother's death. He is shown as the owner on the 1868 county atlas, the 1881 county map, and the 1893 atlas (Figures 3.6 - 3.8), and it was in his time that the latest artifacts were being placed into the sink hole behind the house, as described in Chapters 5 and 6 below.

Sarah Baldwin Klair died March 4, 1901, and was buried in the Red Clay Creek Presbyterian cemetery. The next year, George Klair forced a sheriff's sale of the farm, ostensibly under mortgages that had been executed by his wife's siblings. The buyer was Thomas H. Hewitt (New Castle County Deed Book W-18:261). His daughter Edith was the great grandmother of the last children to live in the house in the 1980s (information from Joan McVaugh, 2003).

The same land was again sold by the sheriff, in 1918, to Security Trust and Safe Deposit Company, after Henry Klair foreclosed on yet another mortgage (New Castle County Deed Book P-27:273).

The bank redrew the map of the Tweed property. First, it sold 18 acres at the south end to J. Howard Mitchell, who already owned the former Lindsay farm adjacent. The rest was conveyed to Robert F, Herring of Wilmington (New Castle County Deed Book P-27:477).

When Limestone Road was modernized in 1924 and 1925, Herring owned the Tweed property. Fred Beulah owned the former Reece lot, described as 2.5 acres next door. On the highway department drawing the former tavern, the barn and the stream are shown, as is the Bulah property line which still reflects the early alignment of Valley Road (Figure 3.9).

John and Lillie Walker conveyed the tavern property in 1928 to the Colonial Trust company, which transferred it to Joseph Baccino in 1929 (New Castle County Deed Books C-38:332 and D-39:473).

In 1934, Joseph and Frances Baccino conveyed 35.8 acres west of Valley Road and south of Limestone Road, including the old tavern house, to Alfred Giacomelli (New Castle County Deed Books C-38:332 and D-39:473). With this sale, the tavern property enters fully into modern memory.

C. THE GIACOMELLI ERA AND AFTERWARDS

Members of the Giacomelli family who lived in and owned the house still reside in the Hockessin area. They have been generous in sharing their memories, photographs and information about the site since the 1930s (Plate 3.1). Esther Neiffer, Alfred and Catherine's oldest daughter, now lives just up Valley

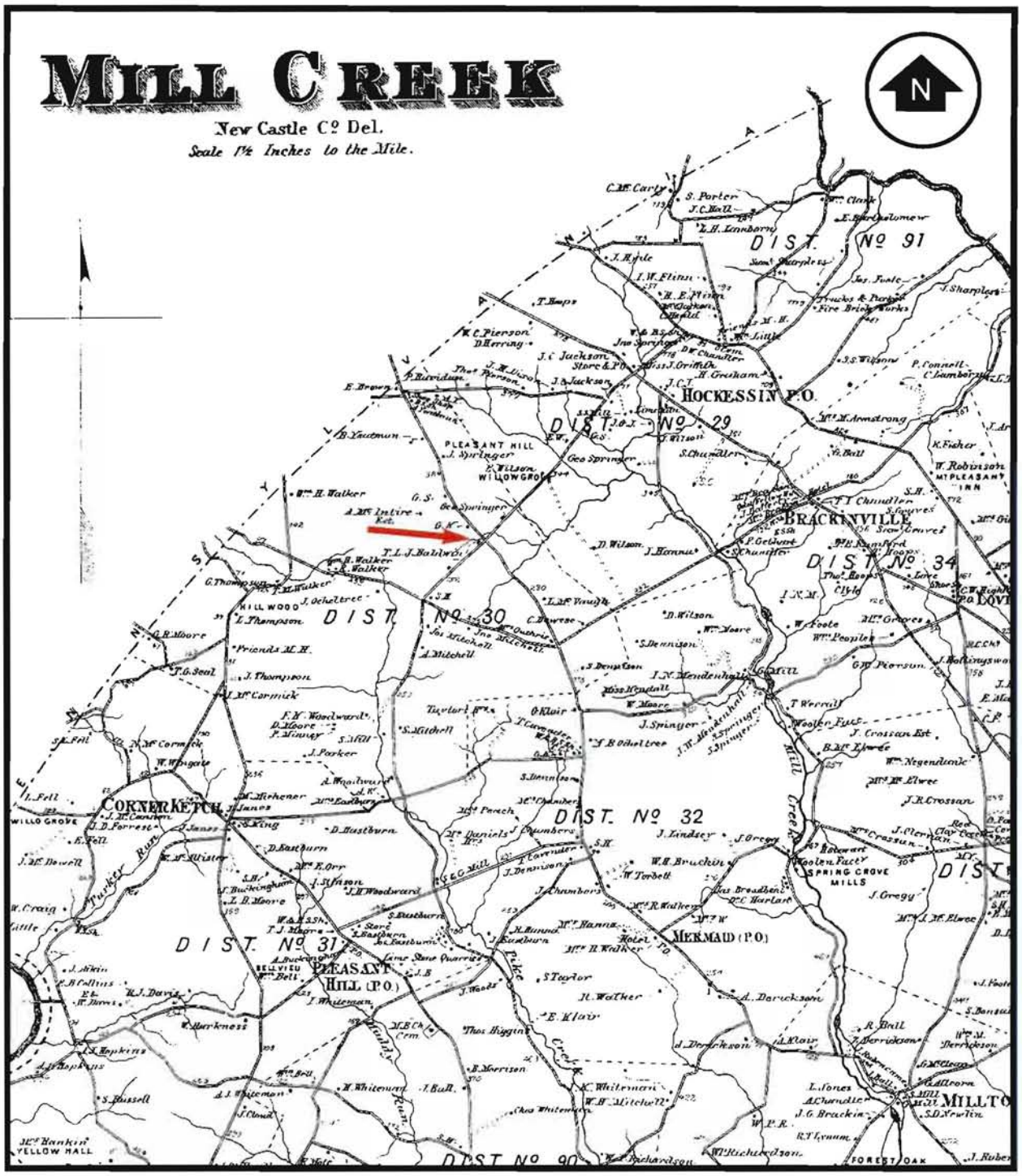

Figure 3.6. Beers, F.W. *Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware*. 1868. Scale: 1 Inch: 3600 Feet (Approximately). Project Area Indicated by Arrow.

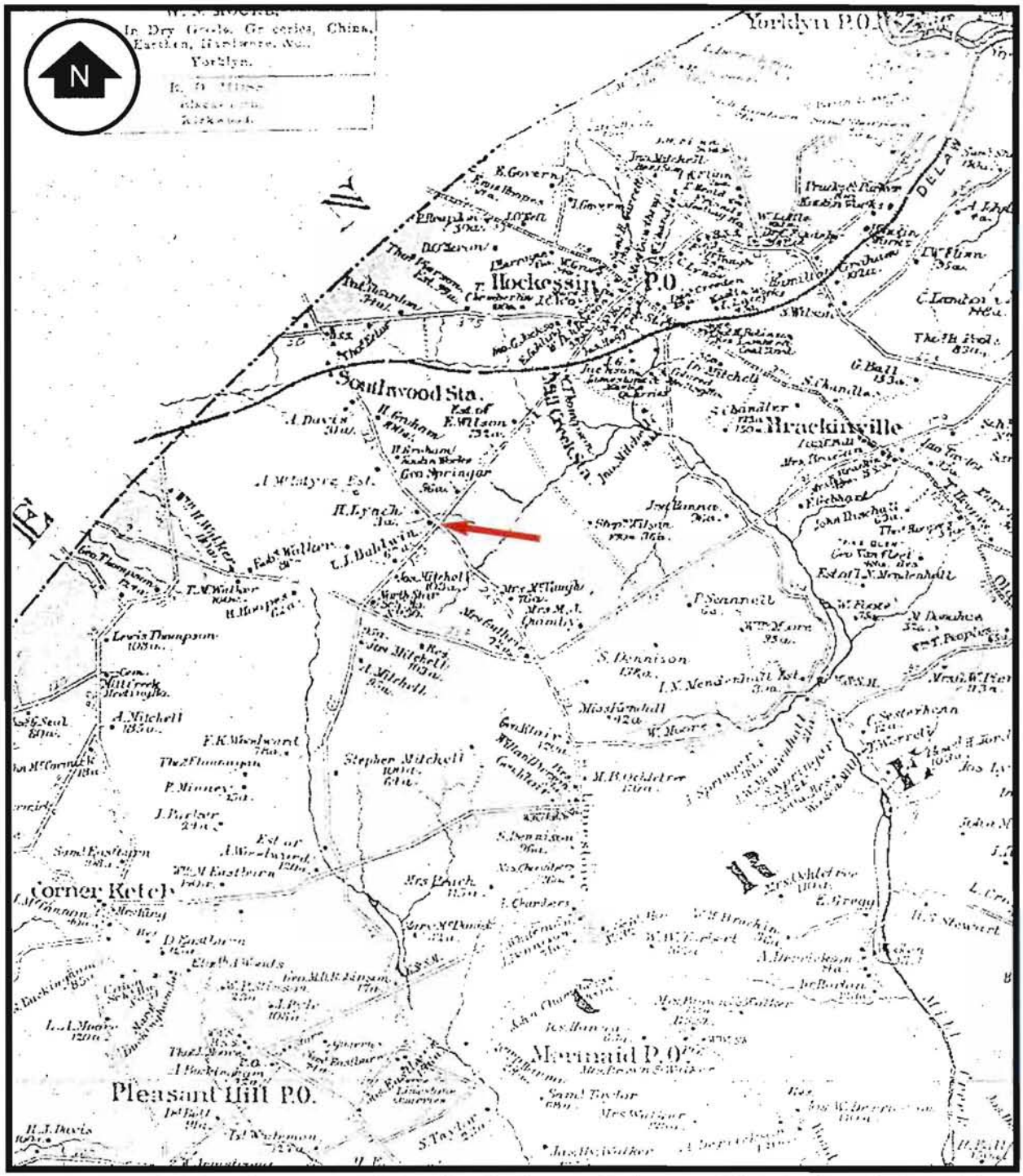

Figure 3.7. Hopkins, G.M. *Map of New Castle County, Delaware*. 1881. Scale: 1 Inch: 3500 Feet (Approximately). Project Area Indicated by Arrow.

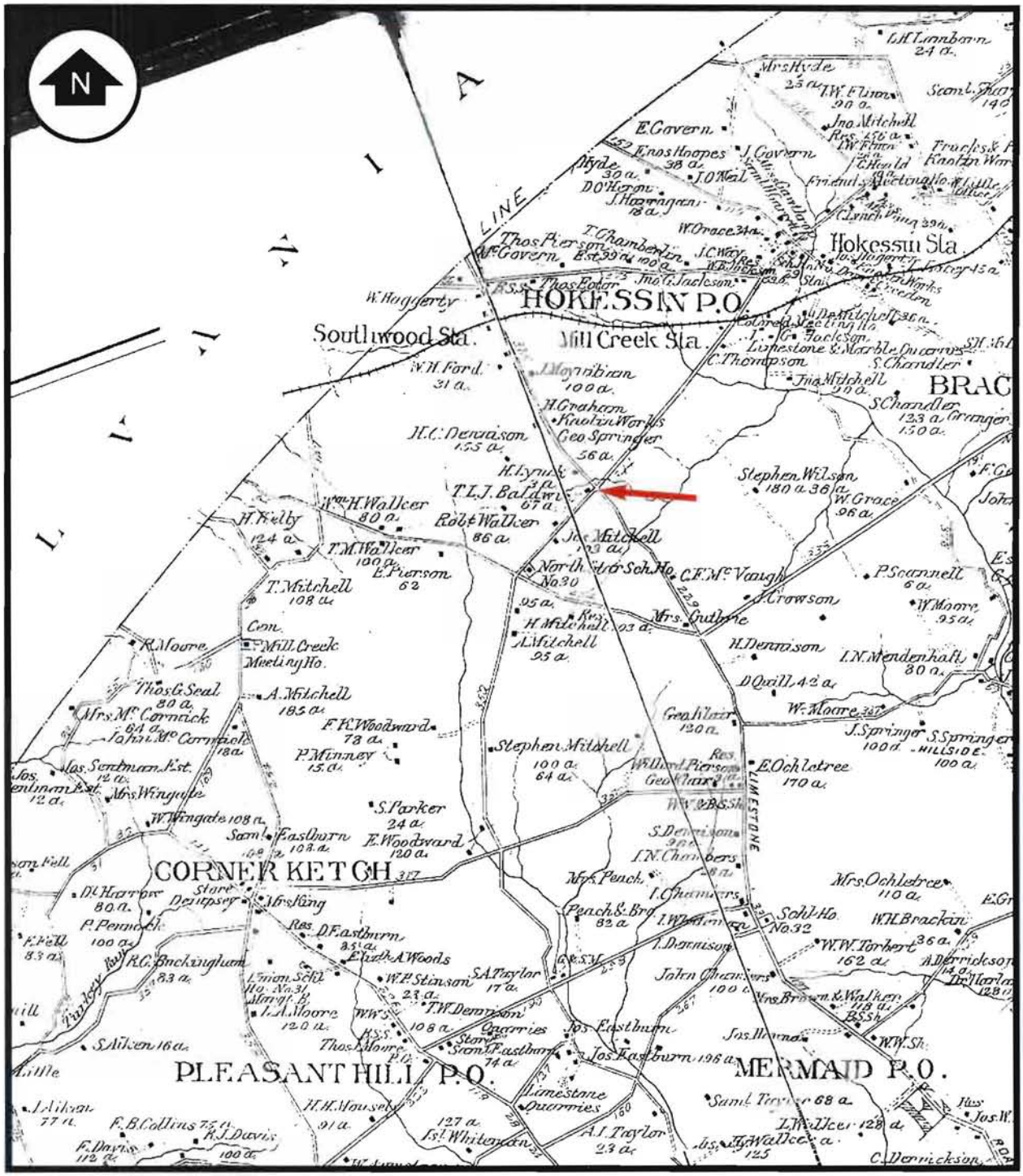

Figure 3.8. Baist, G.W. *Atlas of New Castle County, Delaware*. 1893. Scale: 1 Inch: 4500 Feet (Approximately). Project Area Indicated by Arrow.

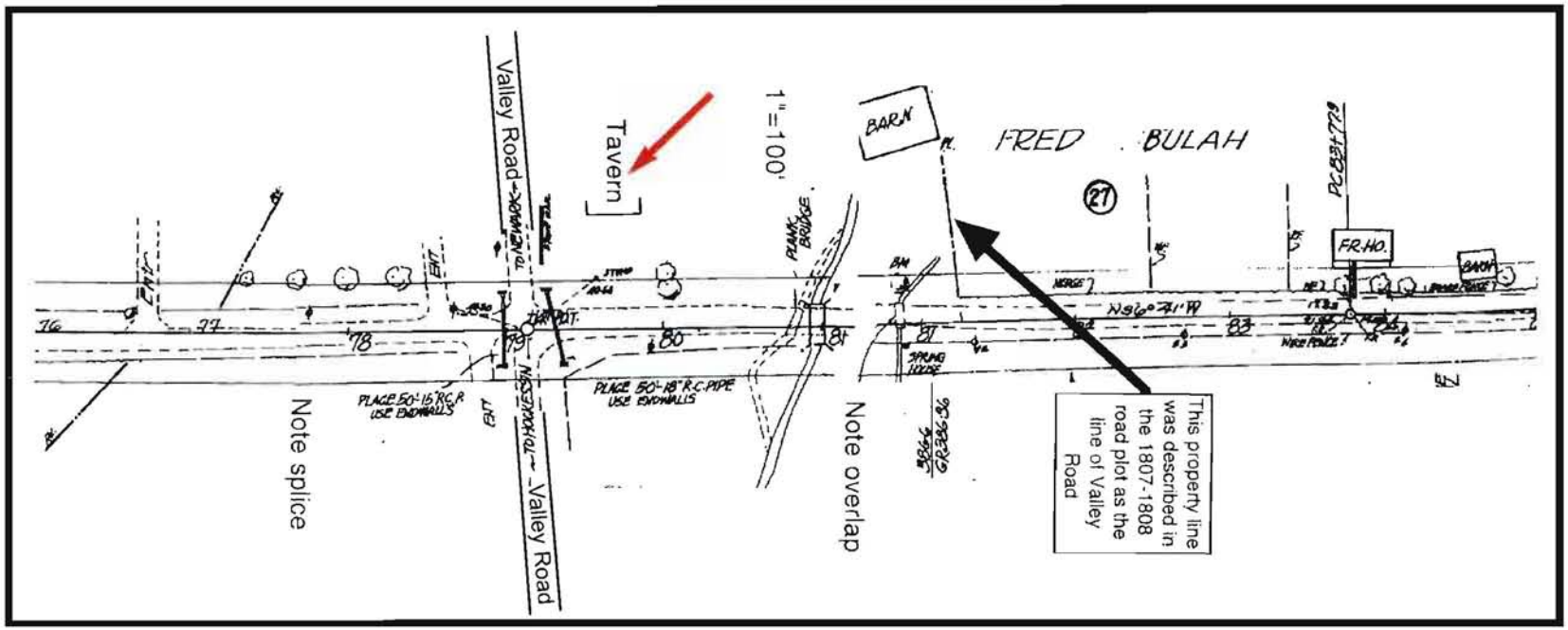

Figure 3.9. Details from State Highway Department Construction Drawings for the 1924-1925 Improvements to Limestone Road, Which Removed an Acre From the Tavern Property. Project Area Indicated by Arrow.

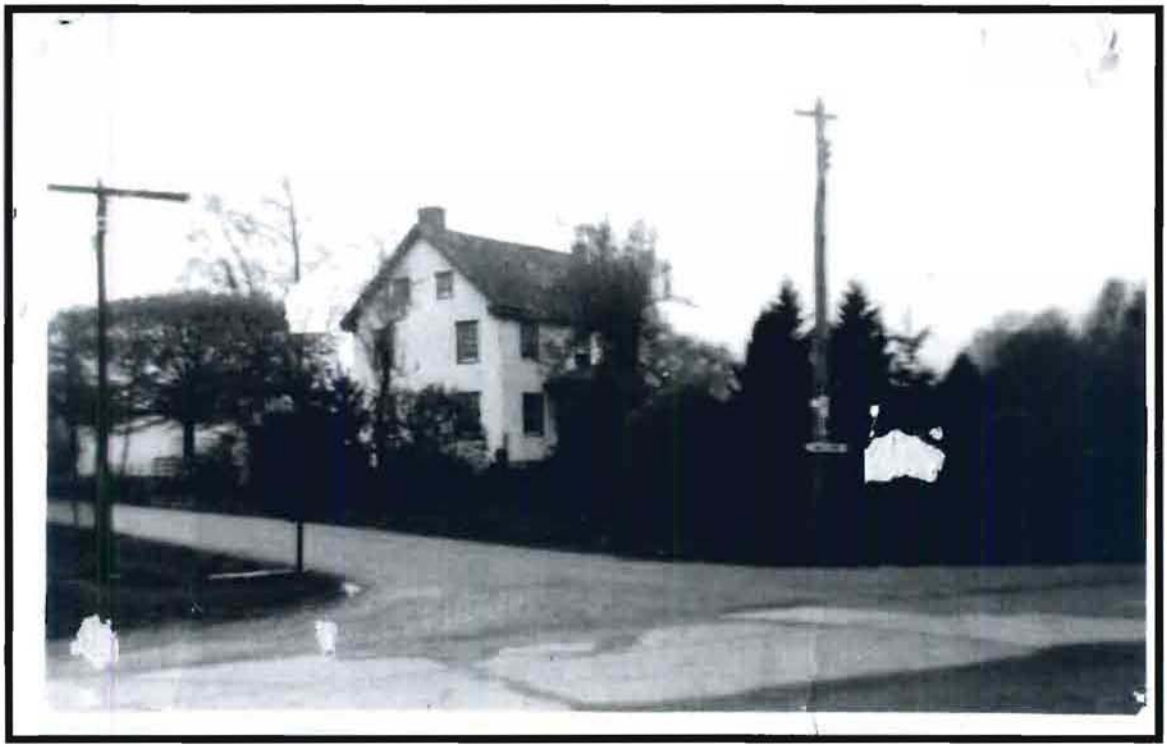

Plate 3.1. Tweed's Tavern from the east in the 1930s. Limestone Road is in the foreground and Valley Road runs off to the left of the view. Note the two chimney stacks, one at each end of the roof. The stack on the right may have served a stove or fireplace in the lean-to (Source: Giacomelli family album).

Road from the house. She recalls that the family moved on to the property in 1930, and bought it from friends of her parents. Five generations of the family lived in the house from about 1930 until 1989. This account is drawn from two interviews with family members in 2003.

At that time the family moved in there was no electricity, and no source of heat in the house other than the large first floor fireplace, which still retained 19th-century cooking equipment. The family knew that the house had once been a tavern, and were well aware that it was of log construction. A decorative mantle, in the Federal style but perhaps more probably a Colonial Revival feature, surrounded the fireplace (Plate 3.2). There was a semicircular mark on the ceiling in the southeast corner of this room which might represent the location of the tavern bar. This room was used as living room, the other as the kitchen. A lean-to on the north end of the house had been used as a kitchen, but was converted into a bathroom soon after the family moved in. A chimney stack visible on Plate 3.1 suggests that some form of heat or a stove was present in this structure, but it does not appear on later photographs. The basement had a dirt floor and was not used for any specific purpose, although later it was used for wine making and for drying the laundry. It had a dirt floor until about 1976. The attic was reached by a ladder. The exterior of the house was stuccoed when they moved in, but was re-done by Alfred.

A barn and a pig-pen, and evidently a number of other buildings, were present on the site when they acquired the property, and these were added to and changed over the years (Plates 3.3 and 3.4). The approximate locations of these buildings and other features are shown on Figure 3.10. The stream that ran through the property was crossed by a bridge.

Alfred and Catherine Giacomelli maintained a varied farming operation, growing Christmas trees, corn, apples and tomatoes (which were sent to a cannery), running a mushroom-growing business, and keeping chickens, turkeys, ducks, cows and pigs. Their granddaughter Joan McVaugh also recalls stories of two horses, Blackie and Whitie, in the early 1950s.

The house remained in the family until 1989 (Figure 3.11) , and Joan recalls that when she was a young child there were nine family members in the house: Joan and her three siblings, her parents, and aunt, and her grandparents. Her great grandmother had also lived in the house until her death in 1935. Plates 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 show the house prior to the construction of the northern addition. In the early 1950s Alfred made the first major addition to the house since it was built, erecting a two-story addition at the north end of the house over the site of the lean-to, creating an additional bedroom for Esther and her husband. This addition is clearly visible on an aerial photograph taken of the property in the early 1950s (Plate 3.8). The house remained otherwise largely unchanged until the 1980s, although the porch foundation on the east side was replaced in cement block before the first addition was built (Plate 3.9).

Joan also recalls the reconstruction of the chimney. The old chimney stack of brick was completely removed and the new stack built against the exterior of the gable wall. During the various alterations artifacts were found in the walls, bean pods, presumably for insulation, were found underneath the attic floorboards, and an unusual, but unidentified animal skeleton found in the ceiling in about 1955.

Joan and her husband moved back into the house in 1974. They added the two-story wing on the west side of the house in 1981-2, and also built an enclosed porch on the east side of the house on the cement block foundation. The house was subsequently sold to

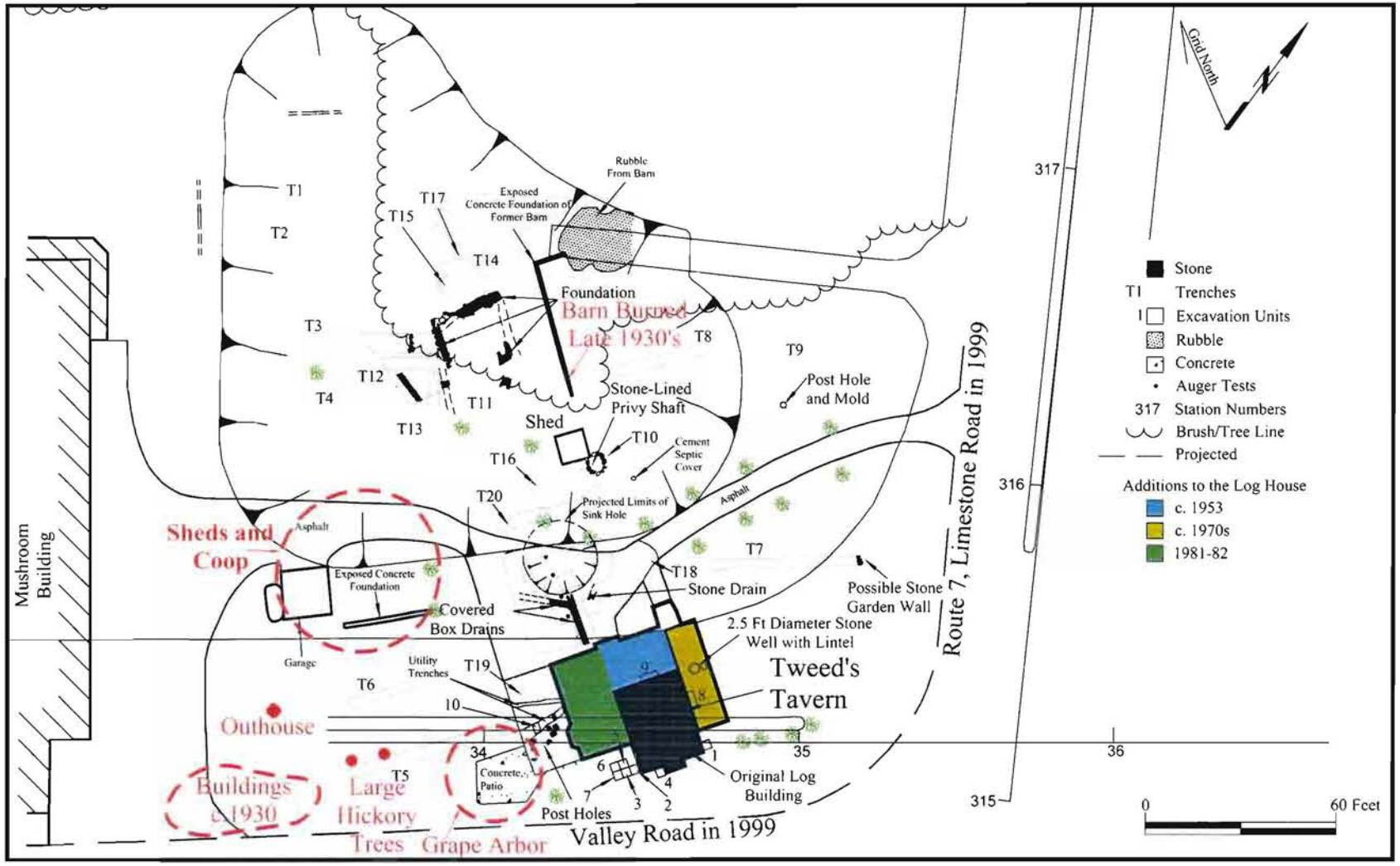

Figure 3.10. Site Plan, with the Locations of Features on the Property *c.*1930-1960 Shown In Red, Based on Information Supplied by Joan McVaugh and Esther Neiffer in 2003. The main 20th-century additions to the house are also shown.

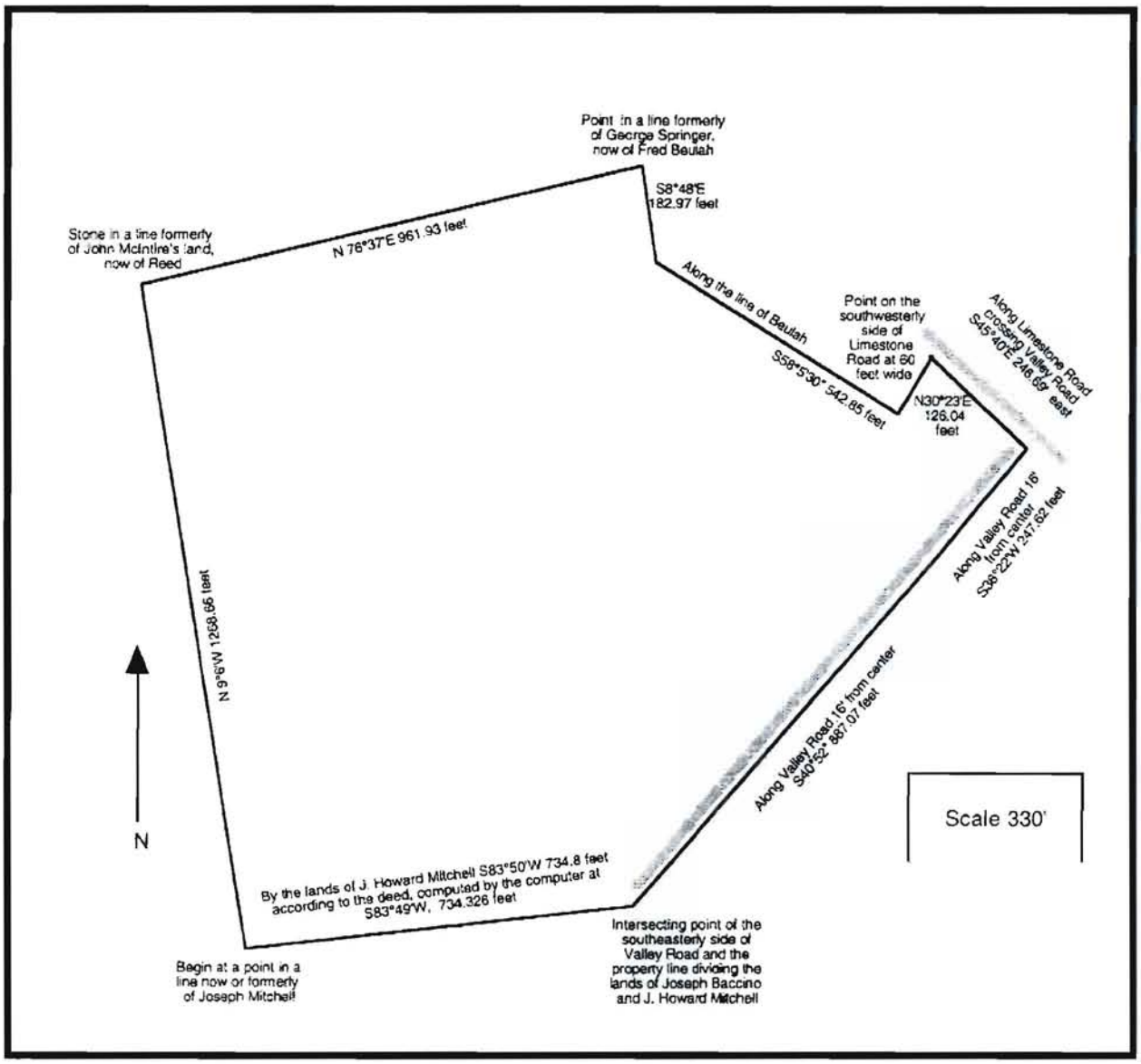

Figure 3.11. Deed Plot of Land Alfred and Catherine Giacomelli Sold to Virginia Ann Dennison in 1957 (Source: New Castle County Deed Book P-59/34).

Plate 3.2. The southeast corner of the living room in the log building, *c*. 1950. The decorative mantle surrounds the now-blocked original fireplace (Source: Giacomelli family album).

Plate 3.3. A family friend displays a chicken in front of the outbuildings west of the house, *c.*1945-6. Note the lean-to at the north end of the house and the open basement entry (Source: Giacomelli family album).

Plate 3.4. Family group showing outbuildings west of the house (Source: Giacomelli family album).

Plate 3.5. Historic photograph of Tweed's Tavern showing western façade and the shed roofed kitchen (at left) (Source: Giacomelli family album).

Plate 3.6. Historic photograph of the lower section of the eastern façade of Tweed's Tavern showing gable roofed porch and double front doors (Source: Giacomelli family album).

Plate 3.7. Historic photograph of Tweed's Tavern showing western façade of building including Door 102b and basement bulkhead door with shed roofed kitchen just visible at left (Source: Giacomelli family album).

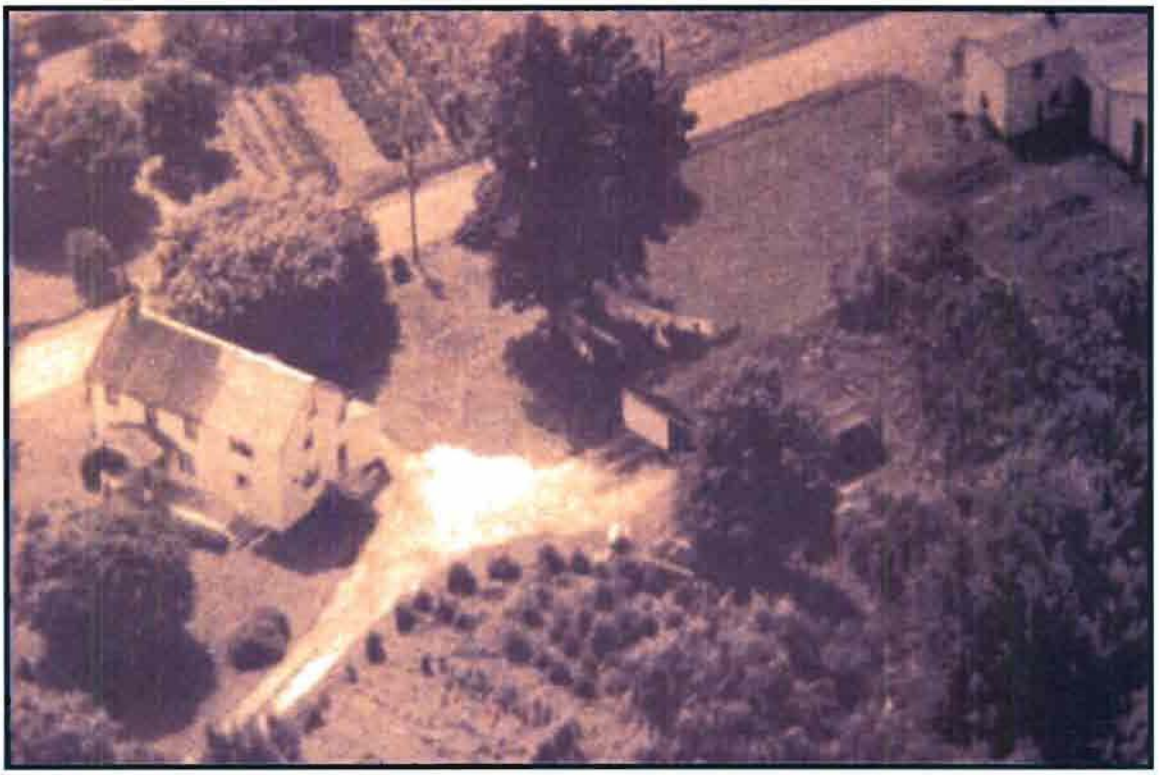

Plate. 3.8. Oblique aerial photograph, facing south, of the Tweed's Tavern property in the early 1950s, shortly after completion of the two-story addition at the north end of the house. Valley Road runs across the top of the photograph. Limestone Road is out of the frame to the left. Also visible are outbuildings, mushroom houses (top right), and the two large hickory trees (Source: Giacomelli family album)[Hunter Research Neg. 99037/20:16].

Plate 3.9. The porch and double entry doors on the east side of the house. This photograph was taken before the addition at the north end of the house was built in the early 1950s, but after the porch had been rebuilt with cement block (Source: Giacomelli family album)[Hunter Research Neg. 99037/20:19].

Mike and Larry Zaccola, who converted the house to an office. It was acquired by the State of Delaware in 1999.

The latest phase of the history of the tavern concerns its identification as a log building, and its removal from the site to a new location as plans were developed for its permanent preservation. Since the true significance of the building had become apparent only in the later stages of the highway project, redesign of the intersection the keep the tavern in its original location was by this time not feasible. Additionally, a large water retention pond north of the house could not be redesigned to avoid causing instability to the building.

In May 1999 Hunter Research submitted proposals for documentation of the building, including provision for monitoring during demolition, since at that time the question of preserving the structure was still an open one. Re-examination of the effects of the detention ponds in July suggested that these would compromise the structure.

In the autumn of 1999 there was a series of meetings about the future of the building and the feasibility of moving it to another location. In a meeting at the tavern on November 8, 1999 Richard Ortega presented his opinion that the tavern building could indeed be moved safely to another location, confirming this in a written report on December 7 (Appendix F). Concurrently, the Delaware Department of Transportation held meetings with the Greater Hockessin Area Development Association and the Hockessin Historical Society to discuss the future of the building. Preservation Delaware and the New Castle County Historic Review Board were also consulted.

In December, the Department responded to the interests of the community, and, as part of an intergovernmental coordination effort, decided to offer the house to local public bodies, or, failing that, to offer it for sale to qualified private buyers who would remove it from the site. A formal bid package was issued for this sale and relocation in February of 2000. Three applicants' packages were received, one being unqualified. As a non-profit group, Preservation Delaware, under initiatives of the Hockessin Historical Society, was the recipient of the house. As a Department decision, the tavern was moved to state-owned property a short distance north of its original location in the early morning hours of June 25th, 2000. At the time of writing (July 2003), the tavern remains at this location while a permanent site on the east side of Limestone road is prepared and the final ownership of the building is determined.

D. CONCLUSIONS

No firm ending date for the use of the site as a tavern has been identified in the documents. It is clear that Tweed's or the Mudfort Tavern was in use from the 1790s to at least 1831. The latter date seems quite likely to mark the end of the tavern period, but absolute certainty is not possible.

The title deed information identified previously unsuspected complexities in the early 19th-century road pattern around the site. The repeated indications that a section of Limestone Road ran in an east-west direction north of the tavern site are quite puzzling, particularly since other portions of the property boundaries run along the alignment of the road as it later came to be. Why was the tavern located where it was if this was some distance from Limestone Road at the time? The shift in Valley Road is less radical, but also raises questions about the original siting of the tavern and which way it was "facing", and why the road was later shifted to the south.