

## 6.0 PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Two proposed districts— Seashore Highway and Melvin Joseph—are evaluated in this report.

### **Seashore Highway Historic District (S-04901) (Detail Map #7)**

**Description:** The proposed Seashore Highway Historic District is located on both sides of Route 18/404 between U.S. 113 and North Bedford Street in Georgetown. It encompasses a mid-nineteenth-century neighborhood of small dwellings built between c. 1938 and the late 1940s, and includes a variety of styles that reflect architectural forms popular during those years. Among the forms represented are the double-pile cottage, the double-pile cottage with front extension, the Cape Cod, the gabled-front cottage, and the World War II-era cottage. Properties within the proposed district include 15 buildings, CRS numbers S-11041 through S-11055.

All of the dwellings are wood-framed and one or one-and-one-half stories in height. Most of the dwellings have been modified to some extent; common alterations include resheathing in modern materials, replacement of original windows and doors, and construction of small additions.

**Applicable Historic Context(s):** Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp zone; Urbanization and Early Suburbanization, 1880-1940+/-, Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization, 1940-1960+/-; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes theme; linear subdivision property type.

**Historic Overview:** The stretch of road between the DuPont Highway and North Bedford Street was part of a longer road originally laid out in 1792 between Georgetown and Robbins Road in what is now the Redden State Forest (Delaware, State of v.d. [1792]). It remained largely undeveloped through the nineteenth century, and by 1917 there were still no buildings within the limits of the proposed district (Beers 1868; U.S. Geological Survey 1917). One building is depicted on the 1917 USGS quadrangle on the southern side of the road, near its intersection with North Bedford Street; this is probably the same structure shown on 1924 roadway plans on a property belonging to E. L. Wyatt (Delaware State Highway Department 1924). This building is still standing and has been recorded as CRS #S-11040, but it is not considered part of the proposed Seashore Highway Historic District, which is a mid-twentieth-century neighborhood.

All of the dwellings in the proposed district date from the late 1930s to the late 1940s, during which time the open fields on both sides of Seashore Highway were transformed into a suburban neighborhood (see 1937 and 1954 aerial photographs, included below). The northern side of Seashore Highway was part of a subdivision of the land of Howard J. Cooke, Esq., filed in Sussex County in March 1938 (Sussex County Deed Book 317:600, June 1939). Cooke's land was subdivided into a total of 30 lots, with frontages on the DuPont Highway, Seashore Highway, and North Bedford Street. The majority of the Seashore Highway lots had 50 feet of street frontage and extended from 291 to 389 feet in depth. It is likely that construction of the first of the houses on the north side of Seashore Highway began shortly after this subdivision was made. A 1954 map of the area depicts side-by-side, linear development on the north side of North Bedford. A few buildings are shown on the south side as well (U.S. Geological Survey 1954). Road construction plans from 1966 show dense development on both sides of the road (Delaware State Highway Department 1966).

**Evaluation:** The south side of Seashore Highway between U.S. 113 and North Bedford Street was reviewed as part of in-house cultural resources investigations by the Department for the

Route 18 sidewalks project, Delaware Technical and Community College to North Street, Georgetown (Delaware Department of Transportation n.d). The only historic-period (i.e., 50 years or older) building identified by the Department was the E. L. Wyatt property, which is outside the proposed boundaries of the Seashore Highway Historic District. No other historic-period properties were identified on the south side of the road between U.S. 113 and North Bedford Street.

Located on a major historic thoroughfare in Georgetown, the proposed Seashore Highway Historic District represents both farmland subdivision and the common twentieth-century development trend of building up arterial roads connecting downtown areas with major transportation corridors. Although strip development is an integral part of the physical evolution of Georgetown, it is a common mid-twentieth-century trend in most North American communities and is rarely considered historically significant. Further, the development along Seashore Highway between U.S. 113 and North Bedford Street is not entirely intact; of the 20 lots developed on the north side of the street, only 10 currently contain historic-period dwellings. The entire western half of the historic-period development on the north side of the street has been demolished, and the dwellings replaced by a large car dealership. On the south side of the street, the westernmost historic-period dwelling has been replaced by a roadway leading into a modern commercial/residential development (across from S-11052). Because it lacks both historical significance and integrity, the proposed district is recommended not eligible for the National Register under Criterion A.

Research has not revealed any association of the proposed district with individuals significant in the history of the local community. Therefore, it is recommended not eligible under National Register Criterion B.

The proposed Seashore Highway Historic District is an example of mid-twentieth-century vernacular residential construction. Most of the dwellings have been altered with the introduction of modern elements such as vinyl siding, new windows, and small additions. There are several modern buildings set amongst the historic-period dwellings on the north side of the street, and two of the historic-period dwellings have been converted to commercial use. As noted, above, several of the historic-period dwellings within the original development have been demolished, and, overall, the collection of houses that remains lacks architectural coherence. Because it lacks the integrity necessary to convey any architectural significance it may have once possessed, the district is recommended not eligible under Criterion C.

The buildings within the proposed district reflect common twentieth-century construction techniques and are not likely to provide new information regarding building technology that is not already available through other means; therefore it is not likely to be eligible under Criterion D.

Seashore Highway



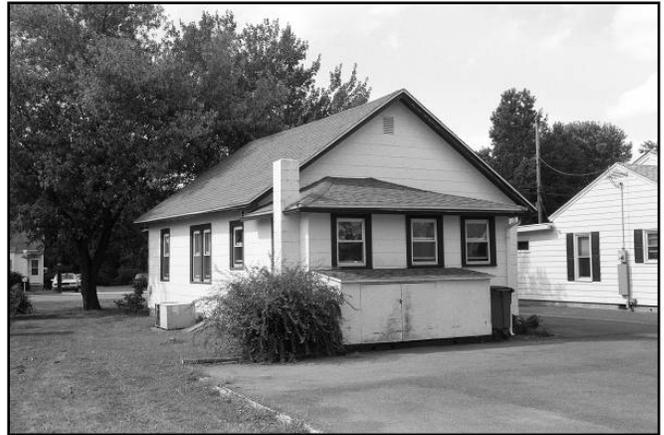
streetscape, from south side of Seashore Highway, looking NW



streetscape, from north side of Seashore Highway, looking SW



S-11041, view to S



S-11048, view to SW



S-11050, view to NW



S-11055, view to SW



(2003 aerial)



(1937 aerial)

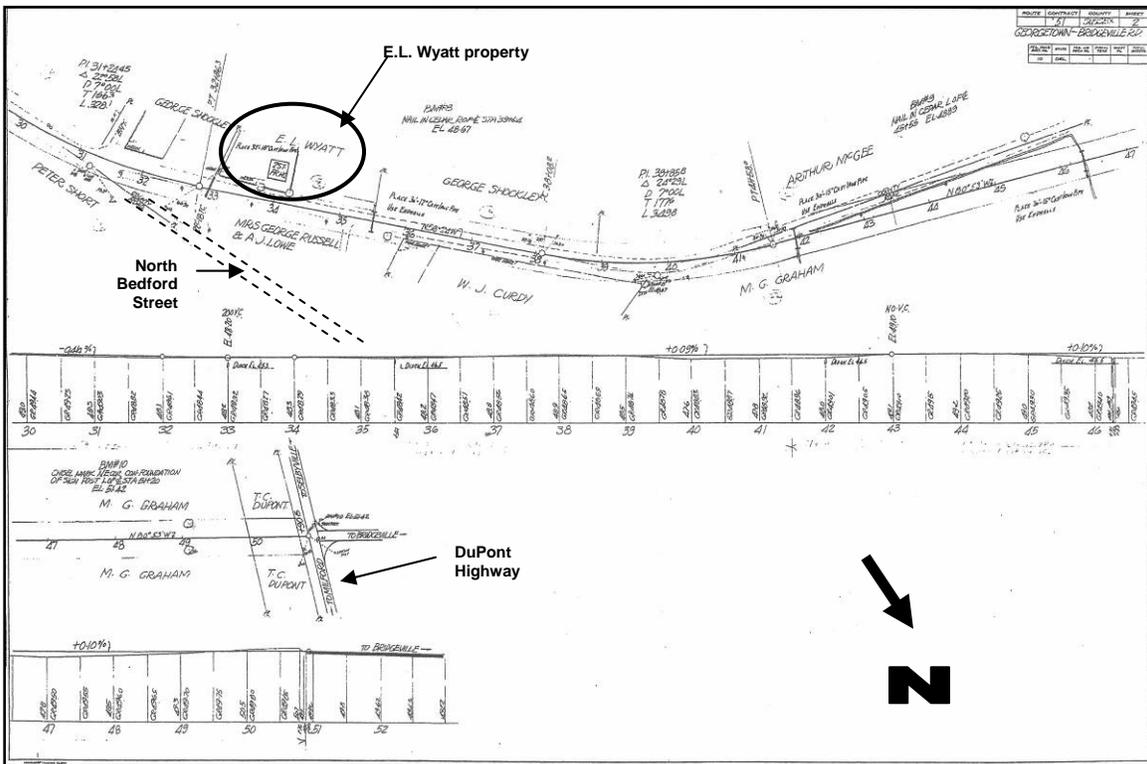


(1954 aerial)

6.0 PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICTS

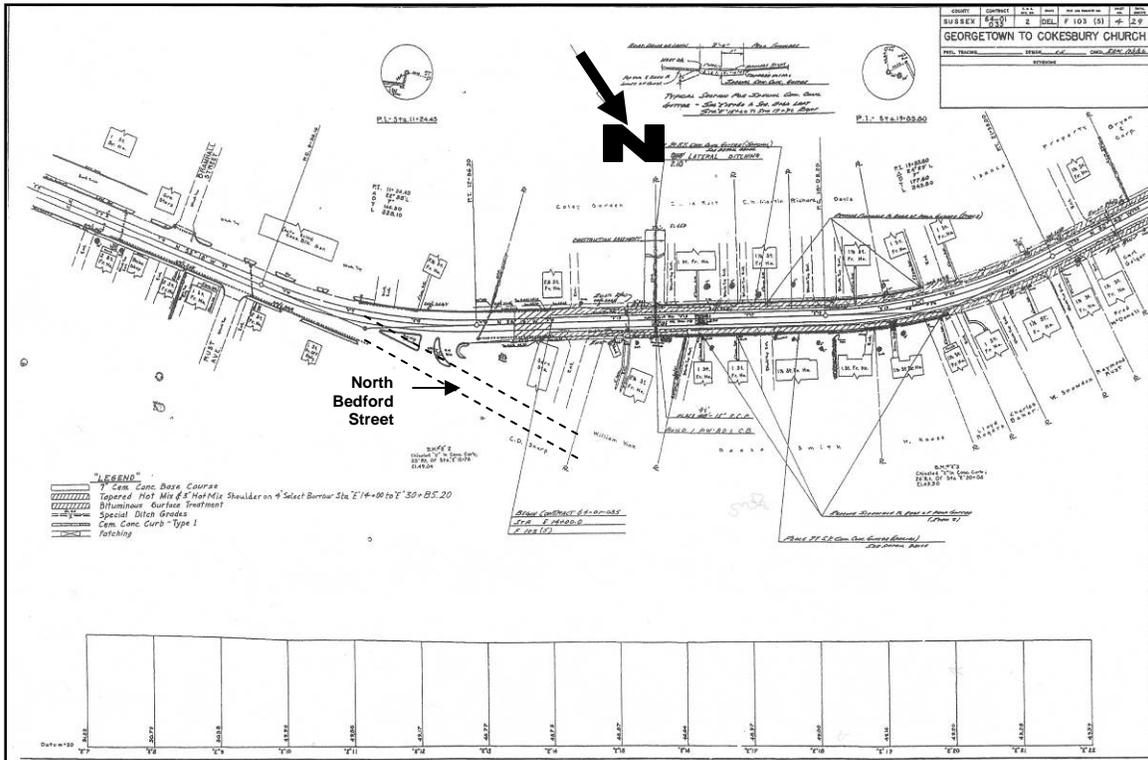


(2003 aerial)

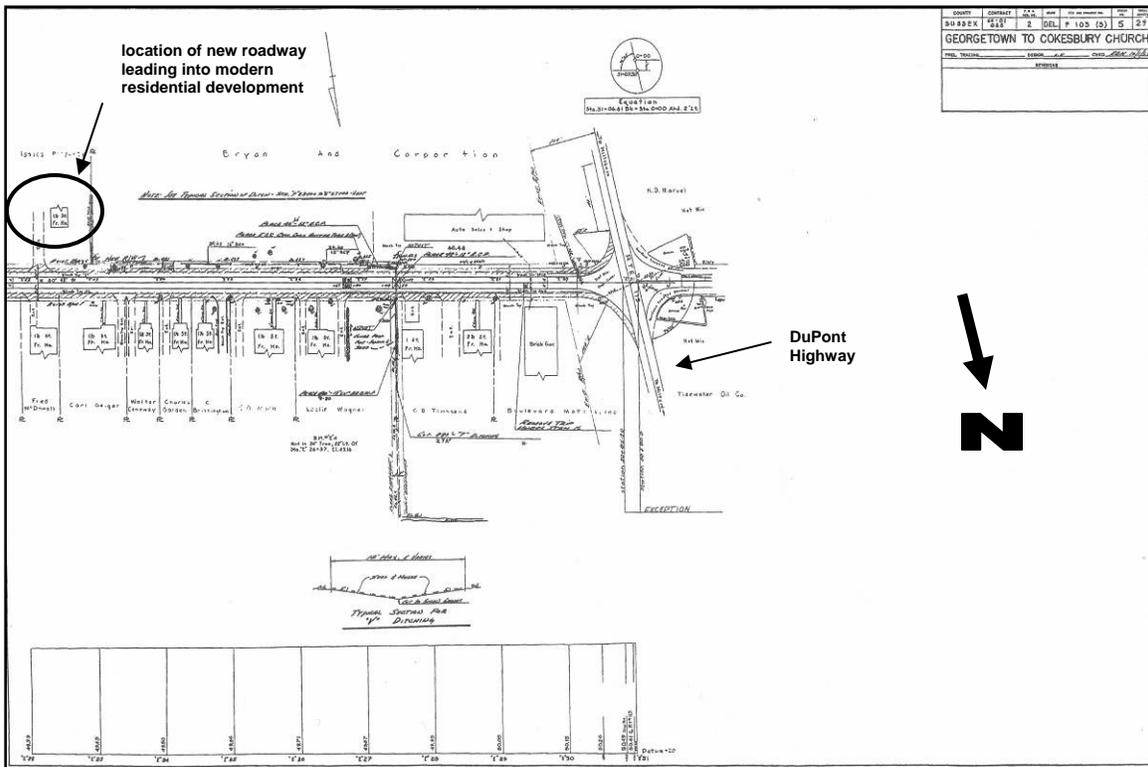


(Delaware State Highway Department 1924:Sheet 2)

6.0 PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICTS



(Delaware State Highway Department 1966:Sheet 4)



(Delaware State Highway Department 1966:Sheet 5)

**Joseph (Melvin L.) Historic District, DuPont Highway (S-04903)  
(Detail Map #15)**

**Description:** This proposed district includes parcels on both sides of U.S. 113 that contain buildings associated with Melvin L. Joseph and his successful contracting business. The resources within the district range in construction date from 1930 to 1962. Property types represented are residential, commercial, aviation, and agricultural. The buildings consist of a combination of wood-framed, concrete-block, and brick construction, one-to-two stories in height. Common alterations over the years include the attachment of additions, the replacement of doors and windows, and the application of replacement cladding. The degree of alterations to the resources individually is high, but as a group, moderate. The resources included in the proposed district include S-10773, S-10768, and S-11728, each of which is individually described and evaluated elsewhere in this report.

**Applicable Historic Context(s):** Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp Zone; Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940+/-; Retailing/Wholesaling theme and Major Families, Individuals, and Events theme; historic district property type.

**Historic Overview:** Melvin Joseph started his multi-million dollar construction business from a small concrete-block garage (S-11728) in 1940. The family rented the property and lived in a small dwelling that stood immediately south of the garage, but is no longer extant. Joseph's daughter, JoAnne Adams, was born in the house, which had two rooms downstairs and a loft upstairs. He used the garage for his business, though he could barely get the front end of the truck into it. At the start of his business, Joseph had only one truck, which he was able to afford with some monetary support from his grandmother. One-half of the garage was used for vehicular storage, and the rear was used for storing supplies (Adams 2006). The family rented the property for only a few years, until the mid-1940s, when they purchased a dwelling to the north (S-10768).

Joseph built his second garage (S-10768.002) on his newly purchased property in the mid-1940s. This property was a much needed upgrade from the first location two doors down. Joseph and his family lived here for just a few years, moving to a newly constructed house across the street in 1948. He operated his business out of this garage for a few additional years, until 1957 when he built the large facility across the street. Sometime over the years, the parcel has been subdivided as the house and garage currently sit on two separate tax parcels.

Melvin Joseph purchased the large property on which the business is currently located (S-10773) c. 1948, at which time he built the house and garage at the southern end (.007 and .008). In 1957 he constructed the concrete-block shop, which he expanded over the years to accommodate his growing business. He added the runway (.005) in the early 1960s, and built the brick house (.004) c. 1962, where he lived until his death in 2005. Joseph raised cattle and horses on the property, a life-long hobby (Adams 2006).

Melvin L. Joseph, Sr., was born on August 4, 1921, the son of the late Harry and Ella Mae Joseph. Possessing only a sixth grade education, he began with a dump truck and shovel and turned it into a multi-faceted business empire. His business interests included building contracting and development, auto and horse racing, treasure hunting and aviation. He established Melvin L. Joseph Construction Company in 1940 and M.L. Joseph Sans and Gravel in 1990. Responsible for paving the majority of roads in Sussex County, he also developed numerous residential communities in the County.

Joseph was also a pioneer in the development of NASCAR. In 1955, his cars won several NASCAR events in Florida. Under contract to the Department, he designed and built Dover Downs International Speedway and the Dover Downs Raceway. Due to his accomplishments in auto racing, he was inducted into the Delaware Sports Museum Hall of Fame in 2002. In the mid 1970s, Joseph teamed with treasure hunter Mel Fisher to finance the expedition that led to the discovery of the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Senora de Atocha* that sank in 1622 off the Florida Keys (*The News Journal* 2005).

**Evaluation:** The historic trend with which the district is most clearly associated is the commercial development of the U.S. 113 corridor. According to the research design, a commercial property must have a substantiated tie to an event significant in the history of the local area or region to be eligible under Criterion A. Started in the early 1940s, Joseph's property does not represent early commercial development of the corridor and is therefore recommended not eligible under Criterion A.

This district was evaluated primarily for its association with Melvin L. Joseph, Sr., a prominent Georgetown contractor and businessman notable for the breadth and, in part, the flamboyance, of his business interests. He was well known throughout the area, and it could be argued that he had an appreciable effect on the development of Sussex County. In 1940 Joseph started a multi-faceted business empire, Melvin L. Joseph Construction Company, from a small one-car garage. His business blossomed, and he was eventually responsible for paving the majority of roads in Sussex County and developing numerous residential communities within the county as well. Joseph's company was instrumental in building a major Delaware sports facility, Dover Downs International Speedway and the Dover Downs Raceway. M.L. Joseph Sand and Gravel was established in 1990.

Eligibility under Criterion B usually requires that the property be associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance. This district represents the entirety of Melvin Joseph's productive life, from the start of the business that brought him prominence in 1940 through his death in 2005. It reflects not only his business, which gained him his prominence, but also his evolving domestic life and his many personal interests, including aviation and animal husbandry. Although the district is located on a road that has been widened many times and includes within its boundaries modern buildings, it continues to convey its association with Joseph and his growing business. It can be argued that Joseph's enterprise was about growth and change, and that, therefore, the growth manifested in recent construction within and around the district does not detract from its eligibility. Because the district is closely associated with Melvin Joseph's productive life and because it retains sufficient integrity to convey that association, it is recommended eligible for the National Register under Criterion B.

Architecturally, the buildings and resources within this district have undergone significant changes and modifications. Alterations to most buildings have been ongoing since they were built. Further, some have even been moved around to various locations on the property over the years. Each has been used for personal, recreational, and business purposes at some point in time. Individually, it is felt that they lack the architectural integrity necessary for National Register eligibility. In general, alterations to each include the attachment of additions, the application of non-period siding to the exterior, and the insertion of replacement non-period doors and windows. The district itself, however, is architecturally significant as an example of a continually expanding commercial enterprise integrated with the business owner's domestic life. The growing success of the business is reflected in the succession of garages, the many additions to the current

concrete-block garage, the progression from smaller to larger dwellings, the incorporation of animal husbandry into the property, and the repeated extension of the runway to accommodate larger and larger aircraft. The district is therefore recommended eligible under Criterion C.

The buildings contained within this proposed district represent common examples of wood framing and concrete-block construction, which is not likely to provide new information on this construction type that is not already available through other means; therefore the district is not likely to be eligible under Criterion D.

The National Register boundary encompasses 90 acres and includes all of Sussex County tax parcels 133-6.00-50.00, 133-6.00-50.01, 133-6.00-50.02, 133-6.00-127.00, and 133-6.00-129.00, as well as a small portion of parcel 133-6.00-130.00 (43 feet northeast/southwest by 32 feet northwest/southeast) and a 272-foot swath of U.S. 113 that connects contributing elements on both sides of the roadway. The district includes all of the buildings and landscape elements associated with Melvin Joseph's activities—homes, office, garages, livestock facilities, pastures, airplane hangars and runway, etc.—within the historic period (i.e., through 1962). Josephs' quarrying activities, located adjacent to the district at its north end, are excluded from the boundary because they were not initiated until after 1968, as evidenced on aerial photographs. The parcel at the southeast corner of the district that contains a modern modular home is excluded because it was not part of Joseph's property until 1966. Within the boundaries of the district are 11 contributing resources (10 buildings and 1 structure) and 15 non-contributing resources (14 buildings and 1 structure). All non-contributing buildings were built after the period of significance; the non-contributing structure is the portion of the U.S. 113 roadway that falls within the district boundary, which lacks the integrity necessary to convey significance.

This recommendation is in accordance with guidelines set forth by the National Park Service, which stipulate that the boundary should “encompass but not exceed the extent of the significant resources and land areas comprising the property” (U.S. Department of the Interior 1991:56). The conditions under which a district may have a discontinuous boundary (“when visual continuity is not a factor of historic significance, when resources are geographically separate, and when the intervening space lacks significance” [Seifert 1997:12]) do not appear to apply to the Melvin L. Joseph Historic District. Although U.S. 113 is considered a non-contributing element because it lacks integrity, the roadway was always an integral part of Mr. Joseph's contracting business. It is more appropriate to include the roadway within the boundary, but stipulate its non-contributing status in its modern state.

**Melvin L. Joseph Historic District**



district overview, S-10773 work yard, view to SE



district overview, looking from S-10773.007 toward S-10773.001, view to W



district overview, looking from S-10773 across U.S. 113 toward S-11728, view to NE



district overview, looking from S-10773 across U.S. 113 toward S-10768.002, view to NE





(2007 aerial)

