

V. ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

A. INTRODUCTION

The architectural survey included a program of field investigation and historical research to identify and evaluate buildings and structures located on the Eskridge property in Georgetown Hundred north of Georgetown. Due to the limited number of resources to be investigated, DelDOT requested that the survey proceed at an intensive (Phase II) level in order to expedite determinations as to whether any of the buildings met National Register Criteria for Evaluation. All buildings on the property were photographed and examined for form, materials and other architectural characteristics. Historical research was then conducted at the Sussex County Courthouse, Georgetown, and at the Hall of Records, Dover. Research at the latter institution was limited to materials available on microfilm and microfiche, since construction work at that institution has required substantial restriction of access to other materials.

The Eskridge tract (Figure 5) is bounded on the south by Road 244, on the west by Roads 243 and 246. Most of the tract is given to the cultivation of corn. Within the tract are two dwelling complexes. One of these complexes is occupied by a tenant, the other by the property owners, Glen and Linda Eskridge. These complexes do not appear to be historically related. Their present occurrence on a single parcel is the result of the current owners having purchased two separate (but adjacent) tracts of land from different owners in 1976 and 1981.

B. MARSHALL TRACT

One of the tracts (1-35-10-8), called in the most recent land transfer the "Marshall Tract", is located on the east side of Road 243 (Sussex County (hereinafter SC) Deeds 1079:226). A house and two abandoned outbuildings are present on the property, most of which is under cultivation. The house has a two-story, side-gable main block constructed of concrete block, with circular patterning cast into the exterior face of each block (Plate 2). Off the east end of this section is a slightly lower, two-story wing containing a garage and the main entrance in the first story. The asphalt-shingled roof of the main block has exposed rafter ends. Windows are metal casements. The house appears to date from the 1940s or 1950s.

The outbuildings are situated east of the house. Nearest the house is a frame barn or shed on concrete block footings, with exterior walls clad in horizontal planking and battened tarpaper (Plate 3). The gable roof is extended to the north with a lean-to. The two-level structure has a large sliding door in the west elevation, above which is a slightly smaller sliding door to a loft. To the northeast of this structure is a frame poultry shed with lean-to roofs and vertical plank siding (Plate 4).

The buildings on the Marshall Tract do not appear to warrant further investigation for National Register eligibility. The dwelling is something of an architectural oddity, due to the patterning in the cast concrete block walls, but does not possess demonstrable qualities of architectural significance or documented association with events or persons of importance in the history of Delaware's Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp Zone. The two outbuildings appear to be somewhat older than the house, but the context of their former use is no longer readily apparent. No further work is recommended for this property. It is not eligible for listing in the National Register.



PLATE 2: CONCRETE BLOCK HOUSE, VIEW TO NORTHWEST



PLATE 3: FRAME SHED, VIEW TO NORTHEAST

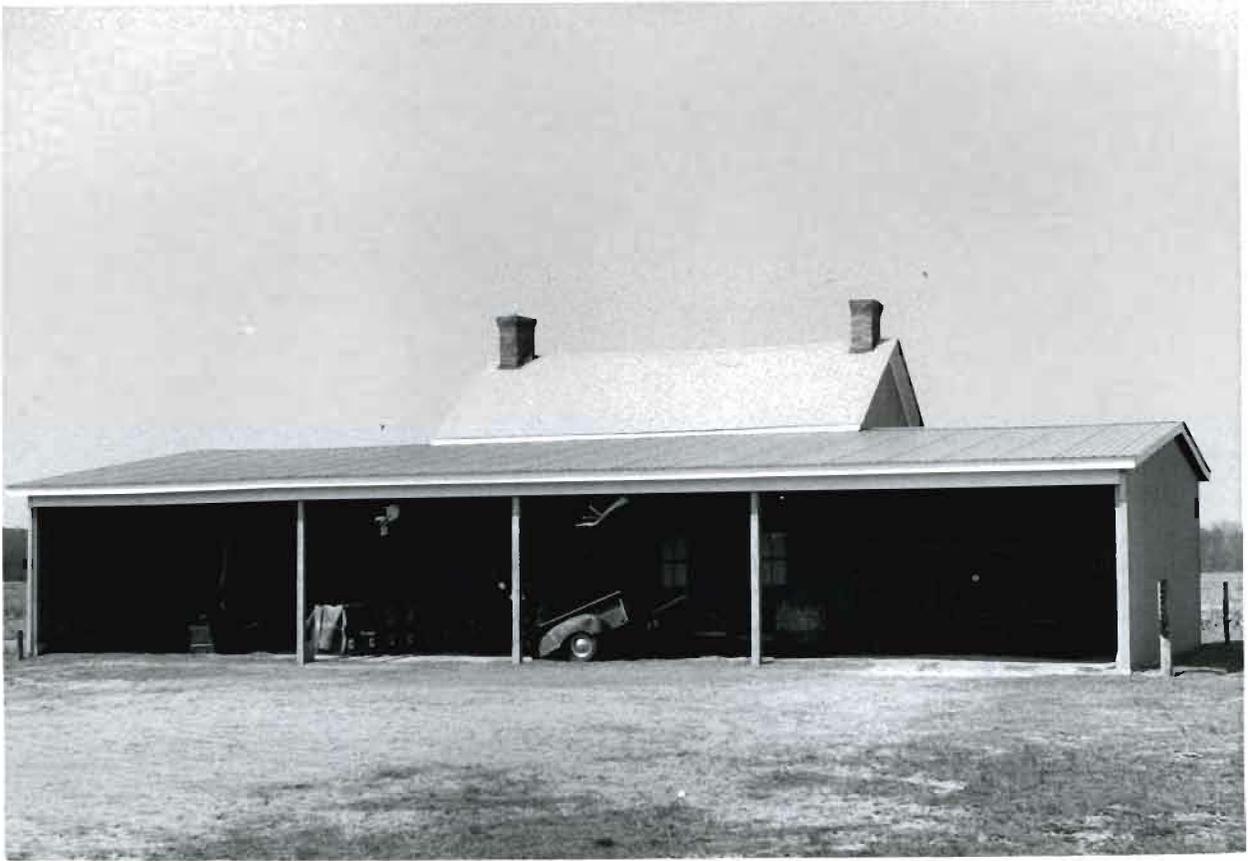


PLATE 4: POULTRY SHED, VIEW TO EAST

C. WARD TRACT

The main dwelling complex on the present Eskridge property is located within tax parcel 1-35-10-9. The complex is situated on the northerly side of Road 244, at the head of a gravel drive (see Figure 5). The complex consists of (1) a modern mobile home, where the property owners reside, (2) a pole-type four-vehicle garage with galvanized metal walls and roof, (3) a small gable-roofed wooden storage shed, (4) a wooden doghouse, and (5) a large galvanized metal equipment shed that has been built around the nineteenth century William H. Ward House (CRS #S-3212). All buildings in this complex except this house are excluded from further consideration for National Register eligibility, since they post-date the Eskridges' acquisition of this parcel in 1976. The Ward House was originally surveyed under the auspices of the Sussex County Preservation Office in 1983 (See Appendix B).

The Ward House (CRS #S-3212) is of frame construction on a brick foundation now enclosed with sheet metal. The house is massed as a 1 1/2-story side-gable main block with a one-story gabled rear wing and lean-to extension that together form a T-shaped plan. A shed-roofed, enclosed porch is located along the southwest wall of the rear wing (Plates 5 and 6). The house is clad in weatherboards painted gray. The roof is covered with patterned asphalt shingles; shaped rafter ends are exposed beneath the roof of the main block. The interior gable end chimneys on the main block are relatively large, terminating in splayed, corbelled caps. The stub of a third smaller chimney is located at the gable end of the rear wing.



**PLATE 5: WILLIAM H. WARD FARMHOUSE, SHOWING MANNER OF ENCLOSURE
WITHIN EQUIPMENT SHED; VIEW TO NORTHWEST**



**PLATE 6: WILLIAM H. WARD HOUSE, REAR VIEW SHOWING MASSING,
REAR WING AND PORCH/LEAN-TO EXTENSIONS; VIEW TO EAST**

The house has a three-bay facade oriented to face southeast, with the main entrance in the leftmost (southwest) bay (Plate 7). The door has three horizontal panels in the lower half, a single large window in the upper half. Window openings on the first story are fitted with 2/2 double-hung sash in flat plank frames. Some of the frames still retain simple molding strips beneath drip shelves. On the front and rear elevations of the main block are two-light "eyebrow" windows set close beneath the eaves to illuminate the attic level. These windows are nearly square.

The interior of the main block is arranged in a single-pile, hall-parlor plan (Figure 6). The main entrance opens directly into the "hall", which contains a large brick fireplace against the southwest gable wall (Plate 8). The hearth has been filled in and a stove thimble installed, but the outer edge retains a simple stock molding and mantel shelf set about four feet above the floor. To the right of the fireplace is a small cupboard, and, in the corner, an enclosed winder stair to the attic. Both the cupboard and stair doors have four vertical panels; the latter is also fitted with a simple thumblatch.

The "parlor" features a somewhat smaller chimney breast ornamented with a simple mantel shelf supported on shaped brackets (Plate 9). A thimble indicates prior use with a stove. Whether a hearth is enclosed beneath the paper and plaster could not be determined without destructive investigation.

The walls and ceilings of the hall and parlor are covered with paper applied to plaster on lath bearing marks of a circular saw. Flooring consists of somewhat rough planking varying from four to six inches wide. Window and door frames consist of unmolded planks.

The rear wing contains one room, the walls of which are finished with narrow beaded tongue-in-groove boarding. The room within the lean-to section at the extreme rear, as well as the porch, are finished with the same boarding on both walls and ceilings.

The attic is also divided into two rooms, the flooring and wall treatment essentially the same as that of the hall and parlor below. In the northeast room, the chimney breast features an applied mantel shelf and is flanked by closets with four-panel doors (Plate 10).

The house was occupied as late as the mid-1970s, and is in fairly good condition. The only obvious signs of deterioration are the peeling wallpaper and areas where the plaster has fallen away from the lath. The partial enclosure of the house within the metal equipment shed (and the garage installed in the northeast re-entrant, angle against the parlor wall) has served to protect the facade and lower portions of the side elevations from weather in recent years. The framing for these modern structures consists simply of dimensioned lumber verticals which have been bolted or nailed to the exterior walls of the house.

Based upon features such as the 2/2 windows, circular-sawed wood (lath, and also the treads and risers of the stair), four-panel doors and stock architectural elements (chiefly the mantel shelves), the main block of the house appears to date to about 1870-1880. The rear wing is a later addition, as evidence by the filling of one of the rear windows in the "parlor" from the inside (leaving the window sash and frame visible on the other side), probably dating from around the turn of the century. The porch and rear lean-to were either built in association with the wing, or relatively shortly thereafter. There is little evidence of further alteration.

The house is historically associated with the eastern portion of the present Eskridge tract. The deed history of the property has been traced to 1866, when Asa Sharp sold a 125-acre tract in Georgetown Hundred to David Reynolds for \$1000. The parcel was among several owned by Jacob Sharp when he died in 1849, leaving Asa Sharp among his heirs. David Reynolds held the 125-acre tract until 1870, at which time he sold it for \$600 to Levin Pepper (SC Deeds 83:479; 83:482; SC Probate Record A98:75).

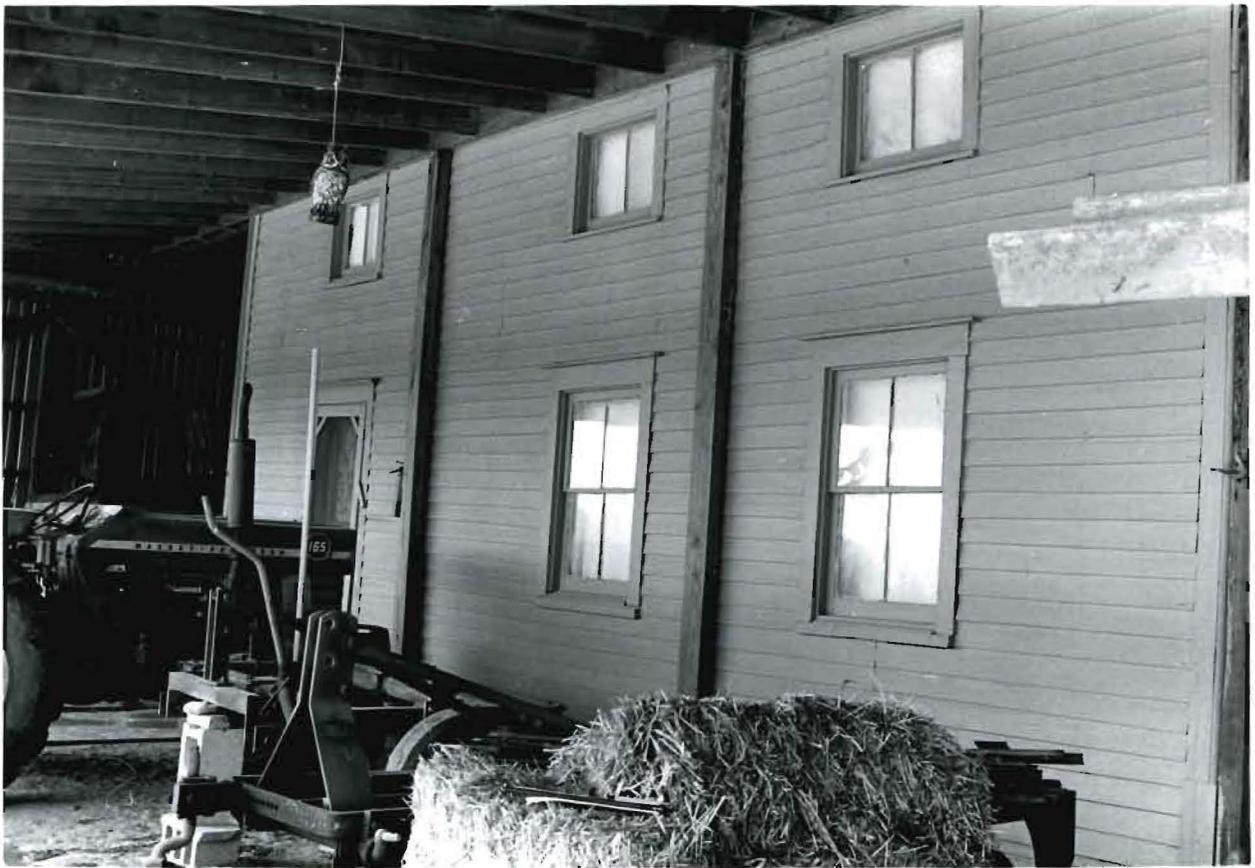


PLATE 7: MAIN ELEVATION OF WILLIAM H. WARD HOUSE WITHIN EQUIPMENT SHED



PLATE 8: INTERIOR VIEW OF WARD FARMHOUSE "HALL" SHOWING LARGE FIREPLACE AND FLANKING CLOSET AND DOOR TO ENCLOSED CORNER STAIR

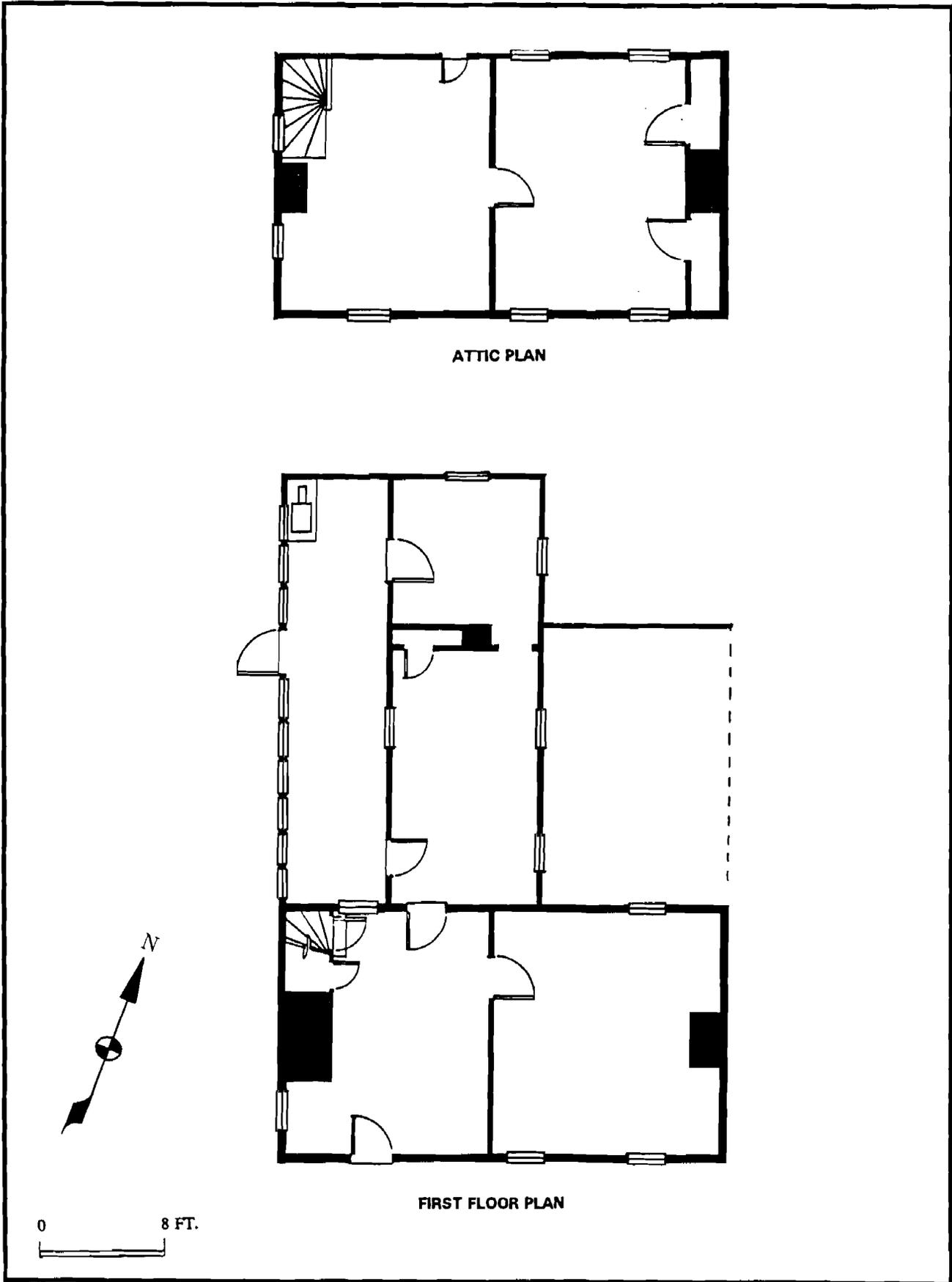


FIGURE 6: WARD HOUSE FLOOR PLANS



PLATE 9: INTERIOR VIEW OF WARD FARMHOUSE "PARLOR" SHOWING CHIMNEY BREAST AND APPLIED MANTEL SHELF



PLATE 10: INTERIOR VIEW OF WARD HOUSE, NORTHEAST ROOM ON UPPER FLOOR SHOWING CHIMNEY BREAST WITH MANTEL SHELF AND FLANKING CLOSETS

In 1870, William H. Ward was a 29-year-old farm laborer residing in Cedar Creek Hundred. His household included his 24-year-old wife, Orpha (whom he had married in 1864), and their daughter Eunice, then two years old (U.S. Bureau of Census 1870; Delaware Marriage Records, Vol. 48 98). Ten years later, in 1880, William Ward purchased the 125-acre tract in Georgetown Hundred from Levin Pepper for \$700 (SC Deeds 92:585). In the Federal population census of that year, Ward had moved to his new farm, and had three more children, including Robert, 4 and Frank, 1 (U.S. Bureau of Census 1880). The Sussex County tax assessment for 1880-1884 indicated that Ward owned a horse, cow, pair of oxen, and a sow and pigs. The small number of livestock and the presence of the pair of oxen suggests that Ward's livelihood was based on crops, rather than livestock (agricultural census data for 1880 and subsequent decades were unavailable at the time of this study). By the 1888-1892 assessment, however, oxen were no longer included in the listing of Ward's livestock.

William Ward had died by the time the 1892-96 assessment was undertaken. His wife, Orpha, appears to have inherited the farm. In the 1900 Federal population census, she was listed as the head of a household that now included only two children, Frank, 20, and George, 17. In November of 1905, Frank Ward was married to Lillie M. Wilson (Delaware Marriage Records, Vital Statistics, Folders 26-C and 9, 1905). Their first child (unnamed in the Birth Index at the Hall of Records) was born in August of the following year. As of the 1910 Federal population census, Frank and Lillie Ward were not living on the family farm. In 1912, however, Orpha Ward and Frank's siblings conveyed their interest in the farm to him (SC Deeds 182:586). The Sussex County tax assessment for 1913-1916 lists Frank Ward as owner of 119 acres (his father had previously sold six acres out of the farm), two horses, one mule and one sow.

Frank Ward died in 1942, leaving his wife, three married daughters and a son. The children granted Lillie Ward 58 acres of the farm for her to occupy for the rest of her natural life. Lillie Ward died in 1974, ending this life estate. Two years later, the Ward heirs sold the property to the present owners, Glen and Linda Eskridge. The deed included a proviso for one Arthur Donovan to live in the house for the rest of his natural life, with the right to have a garden and to garage one automobile (SC Deeds 339:233; 793:264). By the time the Ward Farmhouse was inventoried by the Sussex County historic preservation office in 1983, it was no longer occupied. The equipment shed that partially encloses the house was constructed in 1987.

The Ward Farmhouse possesses integrity of location, design, workmanship and materials. No major alterations appear to have occurred since the rear wing, porch and lean-to were added in the very late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Alterations to the main block at the time of those additions would include replacement of the main roof framing (as suggested by the shaped, exposed rafter ends), interior closure of one of the parlor windows (leaving that feature intact on the outer wall, however), and possibly the filling of the large fireplace in the "hall". The recent equipment shed and garage are clearly visually intrusive elements; however, their construction does not appear to have involved any loss of or measurable damage to the original fabric of the house. Integrity of setting has been diminished by removal of any domestic or agricultural outbuildings that may have once been associated with the house (the U.S.G.S. Georgetown 7.5 minute series map, initially prepared in 1954, indicates that there was at least one outbuilding behind the dwelling), and by the post-1976 erection of the mobile home and large metal garage, and installation of landscaping elements in association with these modern buildings. The overall environment of the house, however, remains rural.

The Ward Farmhouse appears to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, in the area of architecture, within the historic context "Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp Zone Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940+/-" of the Delaware State Historic Preservation Plan. Specifically, the Ward Farmhouse constitutes an essentially unaltered example of the single-pile, hall-parlor plan house. This plan was utilized in Delaware from the mid-seventeenth century onward, persisting in the lower regions of the state through much of the nineteenth century. The

Ward House possesses the distinctive characteristics of the type, as described by Herman (1987:20). Its "hall" is entered directly from the outside, and contains a corner stair to the upper floor, and a fireplace larger than that of any other room in the house. The "parlor" is entered only from the hall. The relatively late date of the house (ca. 1880) is indicative of the general conservatism that was characteristic of rural domestic architectural practices in lower Delaware. The subsequent addition of a rear wing is consistent with the relocation of service activities from the front rooms of dwellings to rear areas, permitting a more formalized use of the "hall". Of additional interest is the 1 1/2 story configuration of the main block, since dwellings of two stories are dominant in the nineteenth-century architectural development of rural Delaware. Rear ells of 1 1/2 stories were not uncommon, but the utilization of the half-story for the main body of the house is relatively unusual. At least two other examples of the 1 1/2 story configuration from the same general time period have been recorded in the area, one on Road 244 west of the Ward House (CRS # S-3213) and the Jacob Sharp house on U.S. Route 113 north of Georgetown (CRS # S-8449).

Because the Ward House is significant for aspects of design, workmanship and materials, and because integrity of setting has been diminished, a historic resource boundary that encompasses the farm lane, the house, and a portion of its immediate setting will be sufficient to include all contributing elements, and to exclude non-contributing modern buildings. A National Register Determination of Eligibility form is included in Appendix C.