

4.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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4.1 Regional Historic Setting

The post-contact history of the Middle Atlantic region begins with the explorations of numerous European peoples in North America. In general, the history of Delaware is divided into five time periods, beginning with exploration of the area and concluding with modern urbanization (De Cunzo and Catts 1990). The first two time periods, Exploration and Frontier Settlement (1630-1730) and Intensified and Durable Occupation (1730-1770), predate settlement in the project area; consequently, these periods are not addressed in this report.

4.1.1 *Transformation from Colony to State (1770-1830)*

Early Swedish settlers quickly recognized the value of the rich soil and favorable climate that the Delaware region offered. The Swedes cultivated tobacco, corn, pumpkins, rye, barley, watermelons, and wild turnips among other crops (Hoffecker 1977:18). By the eighteenth century, Delaware, and the rest of the middle colonies, emerged as the “bread colonies” of the New World (Schlebecker 1975:40).

The Revolutionary War and Farming. The American Revolution brought considerable disarray to the region at the beginning of this time period. British activities on the Delaware River and Bay disrupted the maritime economy of the area, impacting all manner of trade. British, French, and Continental forces passing through Delaware disrupted travel for farmers and merchants alike. Social and political unrest in the colony further heightened an already tense atmosphere.

Colonists witnessed a variety of military forces pass through Delaware during the Revolutionary War. British and Hessian troops marched from Cecil County, Maryland and skirmished with American forces at Cooch’s Bridge, south of Newark, in the fall of 1777. The American forces were forced to retreat, and the British seized Wilmington. The control of Wilmington shifted frequently throughout the winter of 1777/1778. In 1781, Lafayette’s French troops disembarked at Christiana, and then proceeded to march west toward Tidewater, Virginia.

After the Revolutionary War, the population of Delaware grew rapidly, while its agricultural productivity dropped. The population of Kent County was estimated at 18,920 in 1790 (Munroe

1993). A decrease in soil fertility coupled with competition for good farming land and a decline in wheat prices forced many farmers with small operations to sell off their holdings to larger, wealthier farms. A shift in rural settlement patterns was observed as farms began to move from the older coastal settlements to the upland areas in the middle of the state. Factors such as an improvement in agricultural technology and crop rotation allowed for greater crop yields in these upland fields.

Agriculture continued to be important throughout the eighteenth century and into the early decades of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, many dispossessed farmers left Delaware during the 1820s and 1830s, or sought occupation in urban and industrial centers where employment was readily available. Manufacturing and commerce prospered under the influence of an increased labor force. For instance, textile manufacturers in the cotton and woolen mills along Red Clay Creek, White Clay Creek, and Brandywine Creek produced the finished raw fabrics needed to clothe a growing country (Pursell 1958).

Clark's Corner, Mispillion Hundred. In 1760, Benjamin Clark received a patent for 180 acres in Mispillion Hundred at the intersection of roads to Milton and Frederica. The site was to the east and west of what was later the town of Harrington. Land to the north and south thereof was first held by Benjamin Harrington. The first recorded structures on the site were a hotel erected by Benjamin Clark in 1810, and a store erected by his brother, Jehu Clark, ca. 1810, and kept by John C. Harrington (Scharf 1888:1180). Neither building is extant. The Clark and Harrington families intermarried several times and their holdings were both divided and combined on various occasions, leading to some confusion over property ownership and the subsequent renaming of the settlement itself, which was not named for this local Harrington family.

In the period of transformation from colony to state and in the first decades of the period of industrialization and capitalization, Clark's Corner was not only extremely small, but rather remote. Most early settlements in Mispillion Hundred, often referred to as Mispillion Forest, as it was quite densely wooded, were in its northeast sector, while Clark's Corner was in the south central portion of Mispillion Hundred (Scharf 1888:1171). Clark's Corner effectively straddled the Chesapeake and Delaware watersheds, and was several miles from the kind of navigable

waterways along which all of the larger settlements of Mispillion Hundred were situated. Originally, Mispillion Hundred was the largest in Kent County and stretched from the Delaware Bay to the Maryland boundary along the Sussex County line. In 1830, the Delaware Legislature divided Mispillion Hundred and named its eastern portion Milford Hundred. This left Clark's Corner in the far southeastern corner of Mispillion Hundred.

4.1.2 Industrialization and Capitalization (1830-1880)

The effects of the Industrial Revolution led to significant advances in transportation, urbanization, and industrialization in northern Delaware. By the early 1830s, a significant number of transportation improvements were underway. The Chesapeake and Delaware (C&D) Canal, finished in 1829, opened a direct route from the head of the Chesapeake Bay to the Delaware River, eliminating the long water journey around the Delmarva Peninsula. The shortened travel time fostered more business between the major urban centers of Baltimore and Philadelphia. In 1837, 100,000.0 tons of cargo passed through the C&D Canal, while in 1872, the peak tonnage year, 1,318,772.0 tons were transported (Snyder and Guss 1974). The towns of St. Georges and Delaware City grew rapidly and became social and economic points for the local community as a result of the commercial traffic on the canal.

On the eve of the Civil War, the cash value of farms in Delaware totaled nearly \$31.5 million dollars. During the same year, the entire value of manufactures in Delaware totaled approximately \$9.9 million (approximately \$680 million and \$215 million, respectively, in 2004 dollars) (University of Virginia 1998). These statistics, however, belie the differences that existed within the state between New Castle County in the north, and Kent and Sussex counties in the south. Northern portions of the state quickly became industrialized and economically progressive, while the southern portions remained agricultural. In many respects, the state of Delaware, during the antebellum period, reflected the larger sectional differences that existed between north and south. New Castle County accounted for over 90 percent of the total value of manufacturing products in Delaware. The value of manufacturing products for Kent and Sussex counties combined totaled less than \$1 million (approximately \$20 million in 2004 dollars). New Castle County also boasted greater agricultural output than the two southern counties combined.

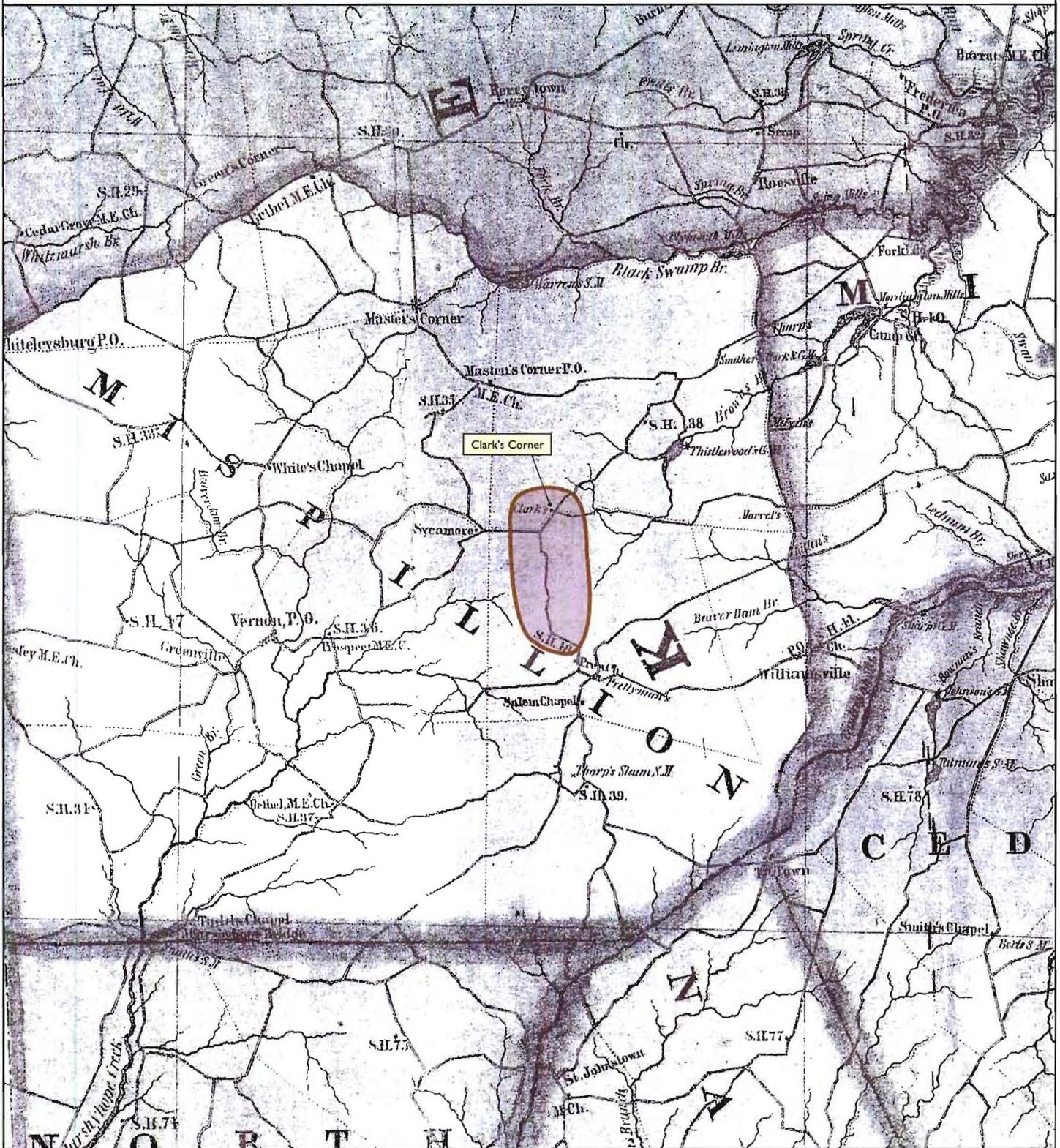
This production reflected the transportation and technological advantages that New Castle County enjoyed during the nineteenth century.

Builders completed the C&D Canal in New Castle County by 1830, and by the late 1850s, tonnage on this route exceeded the half-million mark (Taylor 1951:41-42). The canal, along with the completion of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore (PW&B) Railroad in 1838, provided the necessary transportation linkages with major markets and assured the economic success of the City of Wilmington and New Castle County (ibid:78).

Kent County, however, did not enjoy the same transportation advantages. As a result, Kent County's economy and population remained static for most of the nineteenth century. During the period from 1790 to 1850, the population of Kent County grew from 18,920 to 22,816, an increase of only 21 percent. During the same period, the population of New Castle County increased 117 percent from 19,688 to 42,780 (University of Virginia 1998). As New Castle County prospered during the first half of the nineteenth century, Kent County suffered from economic stagnation. Intense farming of the land, coupled with a lack of soil conservation, exhausted the soil in many southern parts of the state by 1850. As evidenced by maps of the area, there were still no major towns in the Mispillion Hundred area (Rea and Price 1880; Figure 2). Wheat yield per acre in Kent County, for instance, fell to a calamitously low five bushels (Hoffecker 1977: 44).

New Castle County, despite having nearly 15,000.0 fewer acres and over 250 fewer farms than Kent County, boasted of a cash value of all farms of nearly \$17 million in 1860. This figure amounted to almost \$8 million more than the value of Kent County farms (University of Virginia 1998). New Castle County more than doubled Kent County's output of wheat, and more than quadrupled its output of rye and oats. New Castle County also exceeded the amount of butter and cheese Kent County produced by 580,000.0 pounds (New Castle County produced 769,915.0 pounds, Kent County produced 189,091.0 pounds), and surpassed the hay tonnage by 20,000.0 tons (New Castle County produced 24,417.0 tons; Kent County produced 4,109.0 tons; DeBow 1854:208-209). This was due not only to New Castle County's transportation advantages, but also to its progressive farming population. New Castle County farmers formed the "Agricultural

Figure 2
1850 Price and Rea Map of Delaware
 Mispillion Hundred (Area Showing Clark's Corner), Kent County, Delaware



Map Document X: Graphics\Projects\738\Fig2_1850 Rea & Price.mxd



Not to Scale



Project Location

Source: 1859 A.D. Byles Map of Kent County

Society of the County of New Castle” in 1819. This organization sought to help county farmers improve agricultural production and efficiency. The Society provided a forum for the dissemination of modern farming practices including crop rotation, use of labor-saving machinery, and labor management (Herman 1987:117). Many New Castle County farmers also introduced new animals, such as merino sheep herds, and experimented with new crops (Hoffecker 1977: 47). Their progressive thinking, cooperative spirit, and use of new technologies ensured that New Castle County sustained a profitable agricultural economy throughout the nineteenth century while Kent County’s economy foundered until the advent of the railroad.

Transportation Improvements and the Rise of the Peach in Kent County. Two mid-nineteenth-century developments changed the fortunes of the southern portion of Delaware. The first was the extension of the PW&B Railroad to southern portions of the state. As early as the 1830s, elected officials and financiers envisioned the Delaware Railroad (DRR), a rail line that would link Wilmington with the southern half of the state. However, periodic downturns in the economy stalled the project for years. Not until the PW&B supported the project did the idea become reality. The Delaware line finally opened late in 1856, with the southern terminus located at Seaford and the northern terminus linked with major rail networks at Wilmington (Hoffecker 1977: 46).

The second development that aided the economic growth of southern Delaware was the introduction of peach orchards. Successful peach farmers stood to make a handsome profit from the fruit. One 400.0-acre orchard in Delaware netted the owner \$38,000 in one growing season (nearly \$700,000 in 2004 dollars; Rutter 1880:81). Farmers in southern portions of the state planted peach orchards in anticipation of the railroad’s arrival. Prior to the arrival of the railroad, large-scale peach production would have been nearly impossible. Transportation of peaches, a fruit easily damaged, over nineteenth-century roads would have made the venture unprofitable. The railroad however, offered a mode of transportation that conveyed the product to market with minimal damage and spoilage.

Between 1860 and 1870, the value of Kent County’s orchard products jumped from \$35,694 to \$489,283 (approximately \$775,000 and \$12 million, respectively, in 2004 dollars; University of

Virginia 1998). During the 1870s, farmers in Kent County also began organizing Grange Halls. As in other parts of the country, the Grange offered a forum for the discussion of scientific crop management and techniques. The Grange also consolidated the buying power of the local farmers to obtain favorable prices on fertilizers, equipment, seed, and shipping rates (Delaware Humanities Forum 1984:19). With these improvements in techniques, organization, and technology, agriculture in Kent County quickly became a profitable venture.

Railroads in Kent and Sussex Counties During the Industrialization and Capitalization Era (1830-1880). First incorporated in 1836, the DRR Company quickly became ineffectual due to continuing national monetary anxiety and the ensuing Financial Panic of 1837. In 1849, a consortium led by Delaware Chief Justice Samuel M. Harrington revived the company's lapsed railroad charter. Harrington evidently traveled the state giving eloquent sermons about the proposed railroad's benefits. However, despite Harrington's best efforts, it wasn't until three years later when the state of Delaware subscribed to 5,000 shares of stock that the line became viable. Within a year, the PW&B Railroad grew increasingly interested in the Delaware project and threw its weight behind the line's successful completion, providing funds for its construction work. In 1855, the PW&B leased the DRR for a period of 21 years and provided equipment and operational control. By the end of 1856, the DRR's tracks had passed through Dover and arrived in Seaford, a distance of over 70.0 miles. Three years later, the DRR reached to the Maryland border at a location the railroad company dubbed Delmar (Hayman 1979:19-31).

During the construction phase of the DRR, company officials publicly committed themselves to construct a branch line to Milford, Delaware. This promise resulted in the incorporation of the Junction and Breakwater (J&B) Railroad Company in 1856, a line intended to extend from a junction with the DRR at Clark's Corner to Lewes, Delaware. Unfortunately, the Panic of 1857 reduced funding and slowed construction. The railroad reached Milford in 1859, but the impending Civil War prevented most work other than surveying to occur beyond Milford (Hayman 1979:33-39). While backers of the line in Delaware tried to promote the J&B as beneficial to the local economy, "This was in no way intended to be a local railroad," but an integral part of an interstate transportation system (Burgess and Kennedy 1949:398). "Since the 1850's [*sic*] the New York and Norfolk Air Line Railroad had been proposed to run from Lewes

to Cherrystone, Virginia. Steamboats were to run from Lewes to New York, and from Cherrystone to Norfolk” (Hayman 1979:34).

In 1866, the state proffered substantial financial aid to complete the line to Lewes, which the J&B accomplished in 1869. Between 1859 and 1868, the PW&B held an operating lease on the J&B Railroad. When the operating lease expired, the J&B acquired the necessary equipment and began operating its own tracks. In 1874, the PW&B regained control of the J&B through stock acquisition and projected track expansion to the Maryland border and eventually to Franklin City, Virginia on Chincoteague Bay. In 1878, the J&B extended their tracks to the resort community of Rehoboth. Initially, construction of this route required the formation of a separate company in each state during the years 1877 to 1882.

Harrington. The DRR came to Clark’s Corner in part because the inland route was flatter and in part because some larger waterfront communities were suspicious of the train and initially declined to be part of the line. This was a boon to upland settlements where local leaders rightly perceived that the railroad was their greatest hope for growth and prosperity. One entrepreneurial landowner, Matthew J. Clark at Clark’s Corner, subdivided his property to provide land for a railroad station and town lots. When a post office was established there in 1857, he was named postmaster. That same year, the cross-peninsular J&B Railroad began construction that would connect Clark’s Corner first to Georgetown and Lewes, then to Houston and Milford, and ultimately to Rehoboth (in 1878), though never to Queenstown, Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay, as originally hoped (Delaware Humanities Forum 1984:20). The growing settlement was briefly called Milford Junction or Junction Station by the railroads (Gibb 1965:153, 180). However, the post office remained Clark’s Corner until 1862 when the town was officially renamed in honor of State Chancellor Samuel Maxwell Harrington, the president of the DRR and a Dover native. By that time, there were more than 20 houses in Harrington proper (Scharf 1888:1180).

The community prospered sufficiently quickly that the Legislature saw fit to incorporate it in 1869. The 1868 Beers’ Atlas clearly shows the railroad configuration in and around Harrington, as well as the downtown core of residences and businesses that had evolved around the railroad

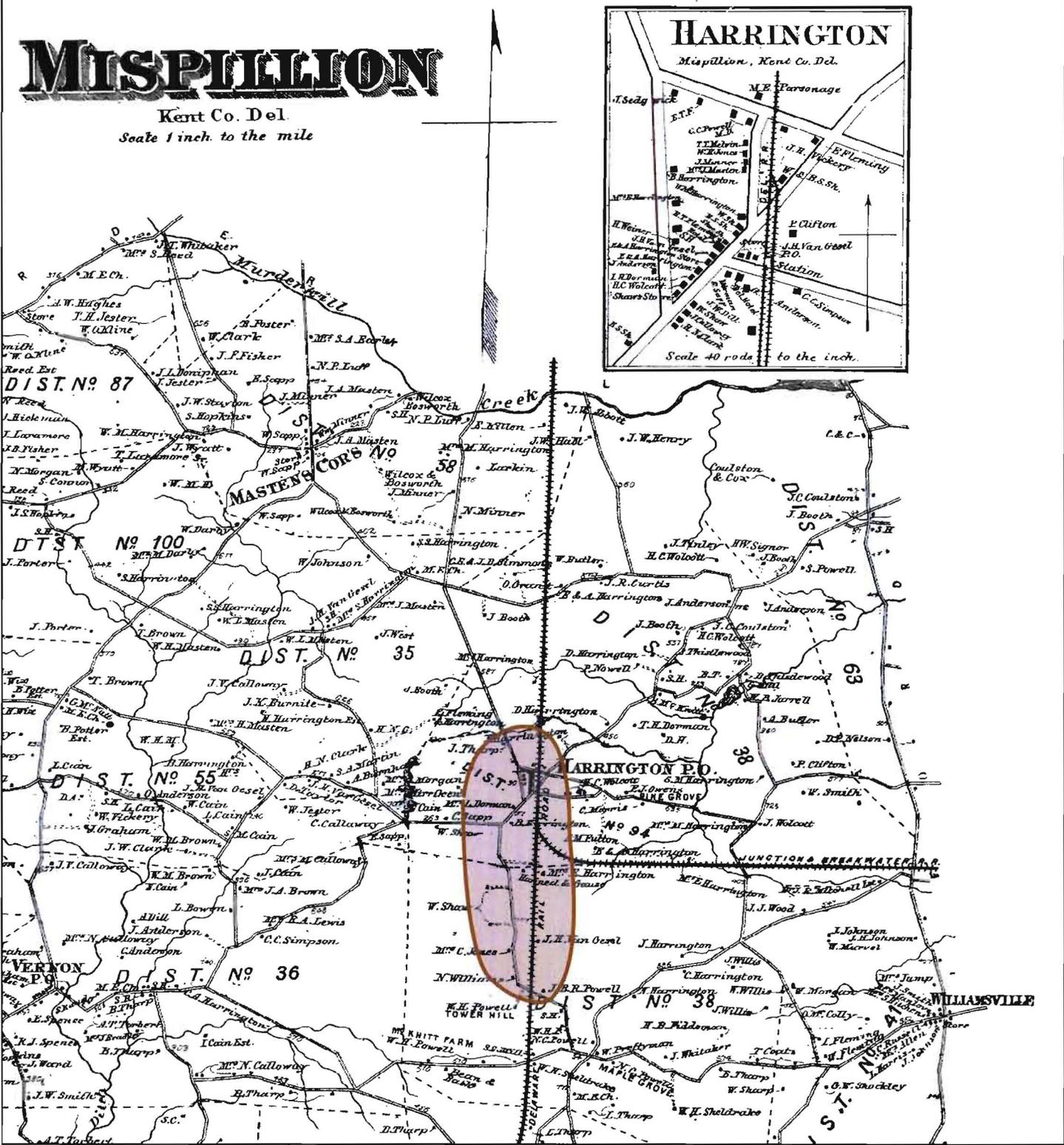
(Figure 3). Though population tallies vary rather significantly—perhaps owing to the time of year at which samples were taken, as farm families were more likely to be in their town houses when they were less confined by agricultural duties—it is clear that the inhabitants of Harrington numbered around 800 by 1880, at least 1,100 in the early 1890s, and close to 2,500 before World War I took many of its young people away to war or wartime work. Subsequently, the population declined with the waning fortunes of the agricultural economy and the increasing mobility afforded by paved roads for auto transportation.

Harrington was established as the railroad hub of the Upper Peninsula (excluding Wilmington) and several local industries grew up around it. Rail transportation made the logging of previously inaccessible forests profitable, and a substantial lumber mill quickly became one of Harrington's largest employers. Though smooth, same-day transportation to Philadelphia and New York allowed many area farmers to switch from the traditional soil-exhausting grains of the pre-rail economy to fruits, some fruits, especially tomatoes, were too fragile even for that trip. Local canneries processed that crop, which was canned by hand until the turn of the century, as well as others others, and a basket factory manufactured the containers in which produce was collected and shipped. Fertilizer was both imported by rail and manufactured in town, and Harrington had at least one clothing factory, staffed by female workers who were comparatively unfettered by protective regulation, that produced inexpensive shirts.

After the Civil War, Harrington rapidly accumulated the amenities of a full-fledged town. Between 1871 and 1881, four protestant churches, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal, were consecrated, and a large grade school was opened in 1884. Several fraternal lodges organized chapters in town, and various small retail and service industries served townsfolk, railroad employees and passengers, and farmers from the area.

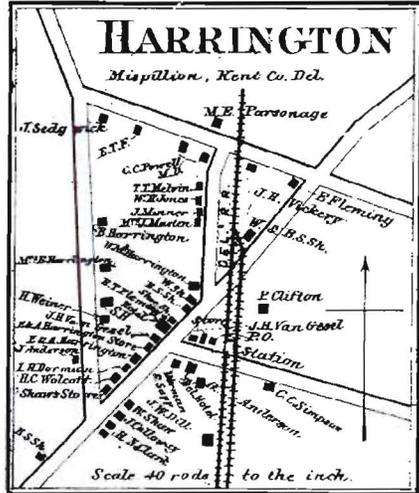
Racial Characteristics of Kent County. In the antebellum period, one demographic aspect set Kent County apart from other counties in Delaware and the rest of the United States. The 1860 census, the last taken before the abolition of slavery, enumerated 7,721 free blacks living in Kent County. This accounted for over 26 percent of the total population of Kent County at a time when free blacks accounted for approximately 15 percent of Delaware's population, and only 1.5

Figure 3
1868 Beers Atlas of Delaware
 Mispillion Hundred (Area Near Harrington), Kent County, Delaware



MISPILLION

Kent Co. Del
 Scale 1 inch to the mile



Map Document X: Graphics\Projects\1868\Fig. 3 1868 Beers.atl



Not to Scale



Project Location

Source: Atlas of the State of Delaware, D. G. Beers, 1868.

percent of the total U.S. population (University of Virginia 1998). No other county in the nation boasted of such a high percentage of free blacks. While slavery did exist in Kent County (census takers counted 203 in 1860), it is clear that it did not represent a major institution. A few factors account for the high percentage of free blacks in Kent County. Environmental characteristics of the Delaware region offered a relatively short growing season and prevented the cultivation of a one-crop economic system. This made the expense of keeping slaves year-round impractical. Farm owners found it more economical to hire workers, in many cases African-Americans, during the summer growing season only.

Political factors also may have induced free blacks to settle in Kent County. The laws, regulations, and social customs of the state reflected both their need for “Negro labor” and their belief in the doctrine of white superiority. The economic reality and the desire to uphold a social hierarchy resulted in an ambivalent record of race relations in the state. Delaware became the first slave state to abolish the domestic slave trade, and the Delaware courts developed a doctrine that presumed persons of color free unless proven otherwise. Delaware was the only slave state to implement such a policy. However, Delaware also passed Jim Crow laws prior to the start of hostilities between the North and the South.

4.1.3 Suburbanization (1880-2000)

The Demise of the Peach Orchard. Peaches presented many difficulties to growers, which ultimately led to the demise of the industry in Delaware. Orchards required intensive maintenance of the soil, and the productive life of a peach tree lasted approximately 20 years. Despite these obstacles, peaches remained a cash crop in Kent County for decades. An outbreak of a disease known as “peach yellows” infected many orchards during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. The yellows appeared in the region as early as 1806, but did not hit the newly planted orchards in southern Delaware until the late nineteenth century. The disease caused fruit to mature rapidly, tainted its flavor, turned foliage yellow, and ultimately destroyed the tree within two growing seasons (Rutter 1880:11). By 1890, the yellows infected many of the orchards in nearly all parts of the state. By this time, however, growers in the south began diversifying their crops (Delaware Humanities Forum 1984:21).

During this period, many growers destroyed their peach trees and planted apple trees. In 1909, the state still enumerated nearly 1.4 million peach trees. Fifteen years later, that number dropped to approximately one-half million, although the state still harvested over 355 thousand bushels of peaches. During this same period, the number of apple trees rose from fewer than 700,000 to nearly 1.1 million, and the number of bushels harvested rose to over 824,000 (Bevan 1929:761). The switch to apple orchards in the early twentieth century made Kent County the largest fruit and nut-producing county in Delaware. The value of the crop rose from \$231,803 in 1910 to nearly \$1.3 million in 1920, and the yearly value of the crop continued to grow over the next decade, exceeding \$1.6 million in 1930. By 1950, however, the value of fruit and nut products fell to \$388,000 (University of Virginia 1998). Area farmers continued to harvest orchard products, but never again would it figure so prominently into the economic success of Kent County.

Rails to the Beach During the Suburbanization Era. In 1883, officials consolidated the three existing railroad corporations, the PW&B, the DRR Company and the J&B, to form a single company. It would be known as the Delaware, Maryland & Virginia (DV&M) Railroad Company. The DV&M operated under its own aegis until July 1885, when the PW&B assumed control of the line. The Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) had purchased a majority in the PW&B during 1881 (Hayman 1979:33-39).

In providing a summary retrospective on the PW&B lines extending south through Delaware, PRR chroniclers George Burgess and Miles Kennedy noted:

[The operations of the] lines on the Delmarva Peninsula ...were not highly successful from the standpoint of their own earnings, but they did contribute valuable traffic to the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore. The growth of the peach orchards was spectacular. In 1875 it was reported that nearly five million baskets or more than nine thousand carloads, were shipped from stations on the Delaware Railroad. The increase in other products was satisfactory also (Burgess and Kennedy 1949:399-400).

During the twentieth century, the PRR continued rail operations in Delaware. In 1930, the PRR combined the lines on the peninsula to form the Delmarva Division that had its headquarters in Harrington. The Delmarva Division became part of the PRR's Chesapeake Region in 1955, and

the division headquarters relocated from Harrington to Baltimore, Maryland (Hayman 1979:134). By the 1930s, passenger ridership began to wane, and trains between Georgetown and Rehoboth ceased operating in April 1938. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) granted permission to discontinue trains between Harrington, Georgetown, and Franklin City in June 1949. Passenger trains operating between Wilmington and Delmar ended in December 1965 (Baer, personal communication 2004).

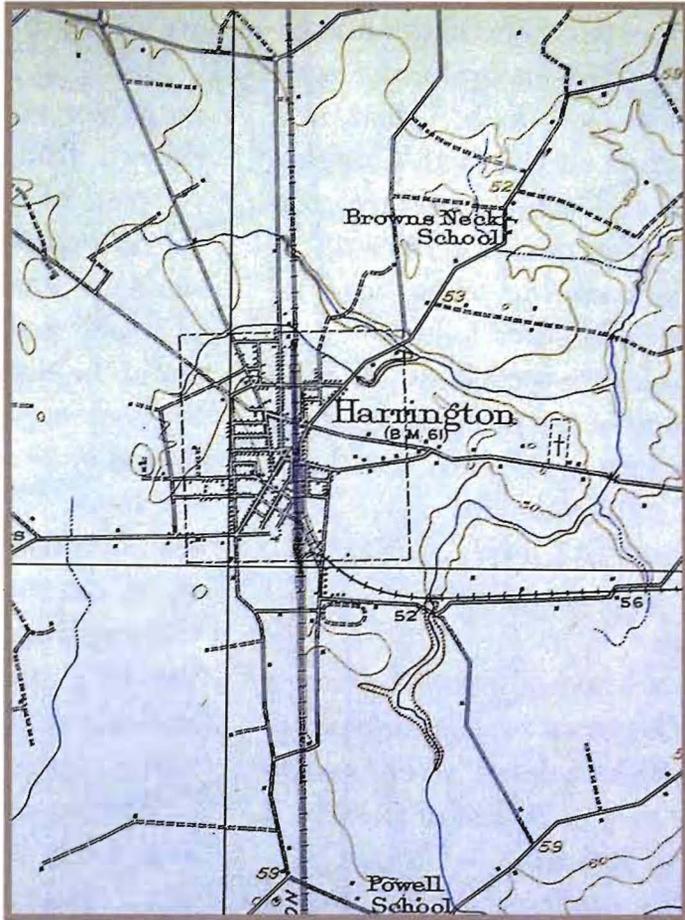
In 1968, the PRR disappeared as a corporate entity when it merged with the New York Central to form the Penn Central Corporation. All subsidiaries and leased lines were included in this merger. Freight service continued through the Penn Central era. By 1970, Penn Central had entered bankruptcy, although some transportation movements continued. The early to mid-1970s was not a good period to own stock in a northeastern railroad; most were also in bankruptcy as freight traffic dropped precipitously and track maintenance was usually deferred (Gunnarsson 1991:165-166). Congress, knowing that federal action was required to save the infrastructure of these railroads, passed the Regional Rail Reorganization Act of 1973 and commissioned the United States Railway Administration (USRA) to develop an overall plan. The USRA filed a preliminary plan in February 1975, detailing, after exhaustive analysis, which railroads and branch lines should be retained and which should be abandoned. Growing out of this report, the United States Congress created the Consolidated Rail Corporation, or Conrail, to assume control, effective April 1, 1976, of the lines deemed worthy of continued service (USRA 1975).

In the mid-1980s, Congress rejected a takeover bid by Norfolk Southern Railroad and ordered Conrail to “go public” by offering stock. In 1994, Norfolk Southern again tried to negotiate with Conrail for a merger. Consequently, Conrail aligned itself with the CSX Corporation, and Norfolk Southern attempted a hostile takeover through stock acquisition. Conrail, Norfolk Southern, and CSX finally agreed to find a compromise, which they reached in 1997. Norfolk Southern and CSX agreed to divide Conrail’s main trackage between them and to share all terminal duties and facilities (Beck 2000, accessed 2004).

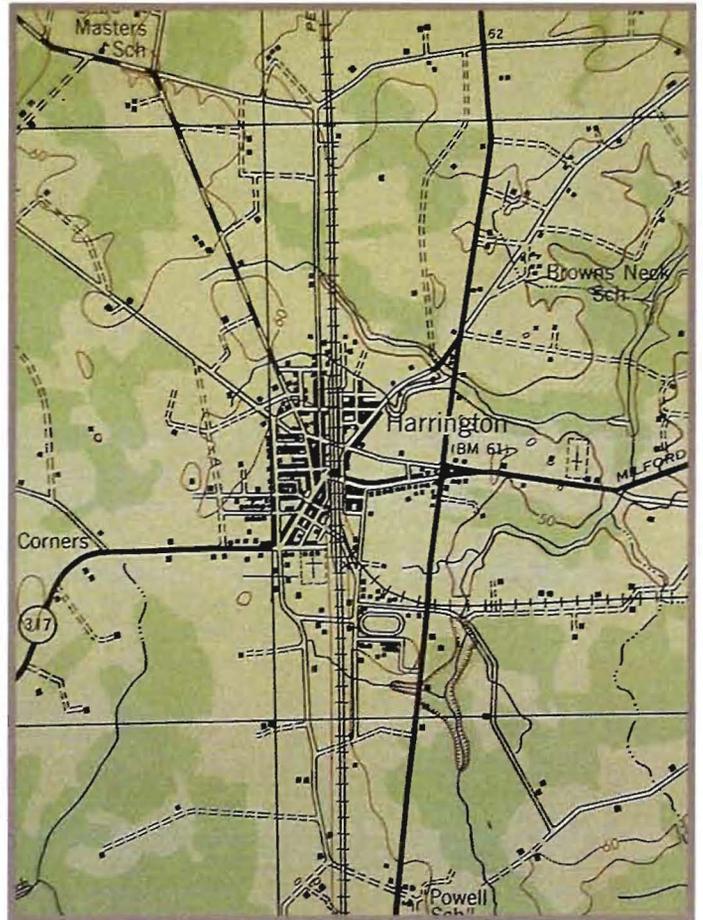
Today, Norfolk Southern operates the former DRR line through Harrington, where it maintains a small yard and still uses the railroad station as an office. Norfolk Southern also still uses the old J&B route, although they have renamed it the Indian River Secondary Track.

Changing Settlement Patterns. By the early twentieth century, the pattern and density of settlement in Delaware had spread from localized urban centers to interlocked suburban communities across the state. Small communities were replaced by commercial and industrial “strip” development along major roads. The introduction of the automobile gave people a means to travel beyond the confines of a train or boat in a short period of time. Improvements to the state road system expanded manufacture, commerce, and agriculture throughout the state. The DuPont Highway (U.S. 13/113), opened in 1924, connected northern and southern Delaware, and shifted the state’s agricultural production permanently toward non-local markets. The highway was designated U.S. 13 from Wilmington to Dover, and U.S. 113 on southward to the Maryland border. Named for T. Colman du Pont, who personally financed the project, the highway was the first modern, paved road to run the entire length of Delaware (The DuPont Highway 2003). In 1933, the State Highway Department widened the DuPont Highway (Delaware History Explorer 2004), making it one of the country’s earliest divided highways.

The southern portion of the highway apparently came several years later, as indicated by topographic maps of the area. The 1938 map shows the Harrington area with the older network of roadways, including what is now know as SR 14, Farmington Road, and the downtown core of roads (Figure 4). By the time the 1944 map was published, U.S. 13 was clearly shown, and by 1955, it had become a dualized highway (Figure 4). Having experienced tremendous growth as a railroad town, Harrington welcomed the new road and charted its course in close proximity to the downtown, rather than away from it as some municipalities did. For Sussex County and southern Kent County, the roadway facilitated a transition to poultry production on a massive scale as trucks could efficiently transport live and freshly dressed birds to urban centers. The building developments and road network in the region did not change much in the later twentieth century, as shown on the 1981 map (Figure 4).



1938



1944

19



Not to Scale



USGS 7.5-Min



1955/



1981/

Figure 4
7.5-Minute Topographic Quadrangle Series, Harrington, 1938 - 1981
 Proposed Harrington Truck Route
 Kent County, Delaware

The Kent-Sussex Fair. In 1919, several Harrington civic leaders met to discuss the establishment of an agricultural fair. The following year, the group was incorporated as the Kent and Sussex County Fair Association. The volunteer directors of the corporation sold non-dividend-paying stock to capitalize the project, purchased their first 30.0 acres of land, set up a horseracing track (they added cars the following year), hired a midway contractor, and opened to the public for four days of competition and amusement at the end of July. In 1924, the same year that the new DuPont Highway conveyed drivers directly to the Harrington Fairgrounds, the struggling Delaware State Fair at Elsmere closed, leaving Kent-Sussex, as it came to be called, the only fair in the state. Despite World War II, the 1942 Fair was held, with war bonds for race purses, but it was suspended for the next three years. In 1944, a contractor rented part of the Fair site to house several hundred German prisoners of war, who lived there without heat or hot water, and apparently without incident, until the end of hostilities. In 1946, Fair festivities resumed on a grand scale with the introduction of pari-mutuel betting and 18 days of horse racing at what has since been called the Harrington Raceway. Though its organizational structure and location have stayed the same for the past 84 years, the Fair was renamed the Delaware State Fair in 1962 to reflect its statewide character. The site is now almost ten times the size of the original fairgrounds, but agriculture and horseracing are still its focus. As the railroads' significance faded, Harrington became best known in the region for its Fair (Mispillion Forest 1990).

At the close of 1940, Kent County remained a largely rural, agricultural area. The 1940 census enumerated nearly 3,000 farms in Kent County, with an average farm size of over 100.0 acres. In the 60-year period from 1880 to 1940, the population of Kent County remained almost unchanged, while the population of the rest of Delaware grew rapidly. During this period, the population of Kent County rose from 32,874 to 34,441, an increase of less than five percent. The population of the rest of the state, however, more than doubled (from 113,734 to 232,064) during the same period (University of Virginia 1998). These statistics reveal the intensely agricultural nature of southern Delaware. Agricultural land remained too valuable to destroy for residential or industrial development. However, the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War brought changes to southern Delaware and forever altered the landscape of Kent County.

Since the mid-twentieth century, much of Kent County has experienced the normal shift away from agrarian pursuits. The immediate project area around Harrington, however, continues to remain agricultural. The major employers in the county now include the State and Local Government and the Dover Air Force Base. The majority (approximately 28.5 percent) of the total employed civilian population of Kent County are engaged in management, professional, and related occupations. Approximately 26.9 percent are engaged in sales and office occupations; 17 percent are engaged in educational, health, and social services; 15.3 percent are engaged in production, transportation, and material moving occupations; and 11.6 percent are engaged in construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations. Presently, only 0.7 percent are engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing occupations (Kent County, U.S. Census Bureau 2004).