

Chapter 7

THE SPRINGER/LITTLE FARM

A. GENERAL CONTEXT

While all the millers and tradesmen who used to reside in the project area also were somewhat engaged in farming, only one property was occupied by a person who could be identified solely as a farmer. During most of the second half of the 19th century, that person was William Little. He took over a tract of land that is first recorded as in the ownership of Jeremiah Springer in the late 1700s. It remained in that family until the late 1840's, when an inventory and sale provide us with a snapshot of a Delaware Piedmont farm at mid-century. In the 1860's it was acquired by Little, who farmed it throughout the late 19th and into the early 20th century. Two phases of activity were identified through archaeological investigations at the farm, and these are presented in detail in Appendix A

The first phase is represented by a pit lying beneath the walls of the later outbuilding. Artifacts from the pit suggest that it was filled in the mid-19th century, and it may be the cellar pit of the log house, which was the Springers' home and which is mentioned several times in documents of the first half of the 19th century. Artifacts from here and from deposits to the east provide us with a glimpse into the material culture of this first phase of the farm. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

The second phase of the farm removed most of the traces of the first. Soils from the west end of the farmstead were removed and dumped to the east in order to level up the ground for a new barn; additional farm buildings were erected over the probable site of the log house, and new well was dug. A new stone-walled house was built to the east and

somewhat apart from the agricultural buildings, and a spring house constructed down the slope towards Pike Creek to the east of the house. This reordering and reconstruction of the farm reflects an inflow of capital into agriculture and confidence in a farming future.

The line dividing agriculture from industry is not a constant, and few places have experienced its fluctuations as fundamentally as the Pike Creek valley. All the millers were also farmers, at least until the Civil War.

Mill Creek Hundred was one of the areas selected for sampling in the historic context of the archaeology of agriculture and rural life New Castle and Kent Counties, Delaware, 1830 1940 by De Cunzio (1992). The agriculture and rural life context was restricted to farms and the non farm homes of farm workers. Peripheral property types outside the farm, such as mills and canneries, are treated in other contexts.

B. THE FARMING ENVIRONMENT 1830-1880

The period 1850 1870, the time when William Little took over the farmstead, witnessed major changes in the structure of Delaware farms. The total acreage under the plow increased almost 10% during the period. The percentage of New Castle County's total area under cultivation increased from 80% to 90%. In New Castle County, farms were small. This smallest county had fully 45% of the state's farmers in 1860, averaging 79 acres apiece, which is half the state average. Agriculture in

Delaware intensified and expanded during the two decades bracketing the Civil War. The Little farm, at only 25 acres (later 57 acres) is at the lower end of the size range.

Mixed farming was the rule in nineteenth century Delaware, particularly among the small farmers of the Piedmont. Farmers of Delaware's upper-tier hundreds also were heavily involved in dairy farming. Half the taxables in Mill Creek Hundred between 1837 and 1861 assessments owned live-stock. The 19th century was also a time of farm rebuilding in Mill Creek Hundred. During this period, the percentage of log houses

in the hundred dropped from one third to a mere 10%, while the number of barns increased by 124%. Both these trends are represented in the archaeological record at the Little Farm. While we have no evidence for an early barn, one was certainly constructed some time around the mid-century. The somewhat fragmentary evidence from the area beneath the outbuildings suggests that the log house was in this area, that it was torn down, and that its cellar pit filled about the same time.

A typical Mill Creek Hundred farm of the 19th century was small, with every available acre under cultivation. The farmer tended to do most of the work himself without hired help. A bank barn, the typical outbuilding, would shelter some dairy cattle. By contrast, the broad fields of Kent were surrounded by more woodland, cash crops dominated, the farms tended to be very large, and wage labor was the rule (De Cunzo 1992: passim).

C. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY TYPES

DeCunzo (1992) presents seven categories of property types associated with agriculture:

1. Agricultural complex
2. Agricultural dwelling
3. Agricultural outbuilding
4. Agricultural quarter
5. Agricultural transport facility
 - a. Agricultural landing complex
 - b. Railroad/Road transport facility
6. Agricultural structure
7. Commercial/industrial outbuilding

Missing from this list are agricultural fields, field boundaries, drainage works, and other features of the landscape that were, after all, the source of the farmer's wealth and the most time consuming subject of his labors. It has been suggested that agricultural fields, including the plowscars and fertilizer residues, constitute a property type of prime importance, susceptible to archaeological interpretation (Heite and Blume 1992:80 97; Heite and Blume 1995:96).

DeCunzo and Garcia mentioned the agricultural field as an identified property type in their survey of the literature, but made no further discussion of the subject in the context study.

All the listed property types may be anticipated in Mill Creek Hundred, although few landings may be expected. Each property type will have local characteristics. Agricultural residences, for example, will be largely log at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but mostly masonry or frame later in the century.

D. STORY OF THE SPRINGER/LITTLE FARM

Across Pike Creek from the mills was a small farm, on property conveyed to the University of Delaware by the Bernhard family (Figure 7.1). The present University tract contains parts of at least two mill

seats and several house sites. In the project area, the University tract contains the remains of the Little agricultural complex. Details of the excavations and documentation of the farm are in Appendix A of this report.

The earliest documentation for the property comes from the late 18th century (Table 7.1). Jeremiah Springer farmed land on both sides of the Creek. His brothers Christopher and Benjamin were both coopers, sons of Charles Springer, a farmer. Jeremiah is listed as owner of the farm property at the time when Wollaston and Phillips were developing the mill seats on the opposite side of Pike Creek. He is shown as the adjoiner on the surveys for the mill seats in 1796 (Figure 6.3).

Joshua Johnson, a fuller, bought property downstream from Christopher Springer, "farmer," in 1798. The property, which would later contain Johnson's fulling mill, was just over 27 acres, lying between Springer's land and the farm of Johnson's father Robert. Johnson's fulling mill dam would eventually occupy the boundary between the two properties on the creek.

In 1814, Christopher Springer divided his part of the home property, selling the western part to John and Anabel Ferris (Figure 7.2). He took back a purchase money mortgage (New Castle Deeds O 3: 285). He reserved the 25 acre part to the east along the creek for himself. He was still there in 1831, when he is cited as the adjoiner in a survey for Joshua Johnson's estate. On the creek, the southern boundary of Christopher's property was Johnson's small mill dam (refer to Figure 6.2). This "reserved" property was later to become the Little farmstead.

The death of another Springer, Isaac, in 1849 triggered the probate process, which opened up the details of his affairs to public scrutiny and gives us

a detailed glimpse of a Delaware Piedmont Farm. As a first step, the Register of Wills issued "letters of administration" to Lewis Justis, authorizing him to settle the affairs of the deceased. The Register authorized a committee of substantial local citizens to take an inventory of the estate's personal property, which they reported was worth \$42.49 (Table 7.2).

The appraisers gathered at the house on Sunday, January 13, 1849, to value the moveable estate. During their appraisal, the committee walked around the log house and the adjacent farm, assigning a value to everything from the drop leaf table to a partial barrel of pickled pork. The first place they visited was Springer's kitchen or main room. There they found a substantial stove with two boilers, a dining table, cupboard and chairs. Tea and coffee pots, a kettle, a large pot, and "cupboard ware" probably describe the dining and cooking utensils of a small household. Fire tongs and a shovel would be needed for any fire, in a stove or a fireplace, but two pair of andirons can only indicate that there was a fireplace other than the stove. Ears of corn would have been kept in the house for preservation, to keep them dry until they were needed. No quantity is given, but \$1.50 would represent a sizable quantity, probably for human consumption.

The appraisers then went to the sleeping area, where an old chest was found. Right after the chest, probably listing its contents, the appraisers listed two old ticks, two quilts and a blanket. The ticks probably were used to hold straw, not down or even feathers. No personal clothing was itemized. There was one bedstead with "sacking bottom" valued at a dollar.

The appraisers went to another location, not specified, where they found an old trunk and a barrel churn, together with a pair of bedsteads and crock-

Table 7.1.
The Ward/Little Farm Site: Sequence of Ownership

Owner	Date	Reference
Christopher Springer	Before 1796	
Jeremiah Springer	1796	New Castle County Deeds S-2, page 330
Isaac Springer	after 1796 to 1849	
Isaac Garrett	1850	New Castle County Deeds F-6, page 112
James Ward	1851	New Castle County Deeds g-6, page 168
William F. Little	1868	New Castle County Deeds T-11, page 154 (25 acres)
Thomas McClary	1980	New Castle County Deeds C-22, page 198 (59 acres)
Bernhard Bernhard	1920	New Castle County Deeds D-29, page 562
University of Delaware	1981	New Castle County Deeds B-117, page 221

Table 7.2.
The Inventory of Isaac Springer, 1849

Item	Assessed Value (\$)
Cooking stove with 2 boilers	3.5
Falling leaf tabel	1.5
Corner Cupboard	1
Bureau	2
1/2 dozen chairs	1.5
2 water buckets	0.2
1 old tabel	0.2
Dinner pot	0.25
Griddles	0.25
Tea Kettle	0.25
large pot	0.5
do [ditto] tray	.12 1/2
lot of cubboard ware	.37 1/2
2 tin coffee pots and tea pot	0.11
pair of fire tongs and shovel	0.25
2 pair of hand irons	.12 1/2
lot of corn in the ear	1.5
old chest	0.25
2 old bed ticks	0.5
2 quilts one blanket one coverlet	
one sheet 2 pillows	1.5
[total brought forward]	\$15.87
bedstead and sacking bottom	1
one old trunk	0.6
barrel churn	0.5
pair bedsteads	0.25
lot of crockery ware	0.1
old stand	0.8
old chanes	0.1
2 piggs	3
tub	.12 1/2
3 old tea kittles	0.2
old griddle	0.2
pickled pork in barrel	
2 thirds full	6
corn	14
hay	0.25
fodder in the field	0.25
axe	0.25
Total	\$42.49

ery. This may have been another bedroom, or possibly a storage area. The old chains, two pigs, the old kitchen ware, and the barrel of pork all appear to have been clustered in an enclosure, such as a porch or shed.

Springer's accounts also included rent due from carpet manufacturer Broadbent and notes of both Abel Jeans and Joseph Eastburn, who are known for their limestone kilns.

Just 13 days after the appraisal, the administrator held a sale. That Friday, 30 of the neighbors gathered to divide the worldly goods of the deceased. The sale list is not only a census of the neighborhood, but it also provides more critical descriptions of the goods. Whereas the appraisal was taken room by room, the sale list is a more detailed catalogue of goods, but without association. The auction brought in \$44.28, very close to the appraisal (Table 7.3).

Like farm auctions today, the Springer sale was a grand redistribution of old things around the neighborhood and a social event. From the list, it is easy to distinguish between the casual buyers and those who attended with an agenda and were prepared to pay for what they wanted. Since a farm auction is as much a social event or rite of passage as a commercial transaction, there probably were many in attendance whose names do not appear on the list.

Outlays ranged from Samuel Glass's dung fork at 44 to Robert Hannah's \$4.07. Some buyers knew what they wanted. Ephraim Yarnall bought only a half dozen chairs.

Only one of the successful bidders was a woman, Mrs. Anderson, who bought household goods. She left the sale with a straw bed, some housewares, three bowls, and an old table. James Anderson bought two water buckets.

Joseph Greenwalt, a downstream neighbor, was one of the day's big spenders. He paid 64 for a maul and an old ax and 34 for a pair of old corn hoes. His "lot of old iron" probably was wrought iron, which was a useful raw material for blacksmith work. He also bought a tub, three tea kettles, two old frying pans, a bedstead, a bottle, and a bureau or chest of drawers. His 10 purchases can to a total of \$1.39, ranging from a penny for a bottle to \$1.05 for a chest of drawers.

The walnut table brought 454 from upstream neighbor Robert Hannah, who paid a quarter for a blanket. Hannah also bought three "bacon hams," 55 pounds at 64 a pound. The hams apparently averaged about 18 pounds each. He was the day's big spender at \$4.07.

Shoulders (what we now call picnic hams) were lighter. Lewis Justis bought three shoulders, 41.75 pounds, at a nickel a pound. He bought 31 pounds of fowl at half that price. Justis also bought the meat tub.

Tools brought premium prices, relative to other items. An old grubbing hoe or mattock brought 454 and an ax was 304. B. Sanders paid 32.54 for a lot of old strap hinges.

In addition to the ax, Robert Daugherty bought a tea pot and pitcher and an old chest. Some of the audience bought only one or two items apiece. Samuel Glass bought a dung fork for 44 and James McCrackin bought only a lot of plates. Some must have come with specific major purchases in mind, like John Crossan's purchase of only the corner cupboard.

Samuel Bell was willing to pay for what he wanted; he bought a tea table for 154, a bake iron for 254, a large pot for 27.54, and a gridiron for 224. He also bought the fodder.

Table 7.3.
The Sale of Isaac Springer's Property,
January 26th 1849

Item	Purchaser	Amount Received (\$)
mall and old axe	Jos Greenwalt	0.6
2 old corn hoes	do do	0.3
old grub hoe or matoc	Robert Gillis	0.45
pair hand irons	James Covington	0.2
lot of strap hinges	B. Sanders	.32 1/2
Tub	Amos Sanders	0.45
lot of old stuff	B. Sanders	.12 1/2
table	do do	6
tub	Jos Greenwalt	0.3
2 old frying pans	do do	0.5
dung fork	Samuel Glass	0.4
one tea kittle	Jos Greenwalt	0.6
one do	do do	0.6
one do	do do	0.3
Bed Sted	Ben Sanders	0.6
one do	Jefferson Kelly	1
one do	Jos Greenwalt	0.1
Barrel Churn	Jas Pierce	0.25
old chaines	James Lee	0.1
grid iron	Saml Bell	0.22
2 water buckets	James Anderson	0.15
lot of old ware,jugs& bottles	James Pierce	0.6
old chest	Robert Daugherty	.12 1/2
old trunk	B. Sanders	0.7
shovel and tongs	James Pierce	0.2
two flat irons	H. Taylor	.47 1/2
old tabel	Mrs. Anderson	0.6
walnut tabel	Robt. Hannah	0.45
Tea Tabel	Saml Bell	0.15
old sythe	John Morrison	0.8

Table 7.3. (Continued)
The Sale of Isaac Springer's Property,
January 26th 1849

Item	Purchaser	Amount Received (\$)
old dishes	B. Sanders	0.7
crook	H. Taylor	0.1
Bottle	Jos. Greenewalt	0.1
tea kettle	James Pierce	.12 1/2
Bake Iron	Saml Bell	0.25
old barrel	H. Taylor	0.1
Dinner Pot	Thomas Hanson	.12 1/2
large Pot	Saml Bell	.27 1/2
lot plates	James McCracken	0.8
4 plates by the piece	James McGonigal 54 ap	0.2
3 bowls by the lot	Mrs. Anderson	0.9
large dish	Mr. Wingate	.17 1/2
2 pitchers by the piece	John Crosin 54 p	0.1
Tea Pot and Pitcher	Robt Daugherty	0.7
2 coffee pots	James Lee	0.6
lot of ware	Mrs. Anderson	0.4
lot knives and forks	Esqr Sanders	0.6
do do	Jos. Woliston	0.15
1/2 dozen chairs	E. Yarnal	1.5
coverlid	Jos Springer	0.25
Blanket	do do	.12 1/2
do	Robt Hannah	0.25
Sheet	B. Sanders	0.6
straw bed and pillows	Mrs. Anderson	0.3
Straw bed	Jos Springer	.12 1/2
Potatoes by the bushel	Gilbert 53/5 bu 564 pr bu	3.1
3 bacon hams 64 by the lb	Robt Hannah 55 lbs at 64 pr lb	3.38
3 do shoulders do do	Lewis C. Justis at 54 41 3/4 lb	2.08 3/4

Table 7.3. (Continued)
 The Sale of Isaac Springer's Property,
 January 26th 1849

Item	Purchaser	Amount Received (\$)
do Fowles do do	do do 31 lbs at 2 1/2 lb	.77 1/2
corn in the ear by the b	James Covington	--
cooking stove	A. Sanders	3.75
corner cupboard	Jhn Crosin	0.75
Bureau or case drawers	Jos Greenwalt	1.05
2 pigs	E McElwee \$2.50 a piece	5.00
Cow	Wm Gillis	17.25
Hay	Wesley Hammond	1.25
Fodder	Saml Bell	0.6
Meat Tub	Lewis C. Justis	0.6
Axe	obt. Daugherty	0.3
TOTAL		44.28

Lewis Justis, administrator of Isaac Springer, was authorized by Orphans Court to sell the 25 acre farm in 1850 (New Castle Deeds F 6, page 112) to Isaac Garrett, a miller and owner of snuff mills, who lived in Philadelphia and at Yorklyn. At the time it contained a small log house. Isaac Garrett was not among the successful bidders at the auction.

Garrett sold the 25 acres a year later to Henry Kane (New Castle Deeds G 6, page 168). Kane lived elsewhere, for he is listed throughout his ownership as a resident of Christiana Hundred. Kane sold the tract in 1860 to James Ward, an Irish immigrant (New Castle Deeds K 7, page 15).

During the eight years of his ownership, Ward's property doubled in value, which may indicate that he made major improvements. We may surmise that he or William Little tore down the log house and any other buildings from the earlier era and built the more substantial structures whose remains are on the site today. In March 1868, James Ward bought the old Wollaston mill seat across Pike Creek and then sold the 25 acres to William F. Little, who would spend the rest of his life farming the property and two other tracts he added to it (New Castle Deeds T 11, page 154). He died in 1908, after 40 years of farming the property.

William F. Little's property changed considerably during his tenure. Originally the Pike Creek Road passed through the property and crossed the creek farther down (Beers 1868, Figure 6.5). By 1888, the road had been relocated across the stream to its present alignment (Court of General Sessions Road Papers 1888).

The core of the farmstead in Little's time was a roughly triangular area with a barn at its western apex (Figure 7.3). The northern side of the farmstead lay along Henderson Road, from which it was separated by a substantial whitewashed mortared

stone retaining wall. To the east of the barn was a group of structures on a slightly different alignment built against the eastern segment of the retaining wall. There may have been access from the road in the space between these two all segments. A north-south wall extending from this eastern segment of the retaining wall (913) divides the triangular farmstead space into a smaller, western portion by the barn and a much larger eastern area leading to the farmhouse on the slightly higher ground to the east. It remains very unclear how the two groups of structures, the barn and the outbuildings, relate to each other, and the structural evidence at the northeast corner of the barn area is confusing. Scarring on the standing walls, the presence of stone piers and postholes, and interior partitioning in the northwest corner of the barn, all show that these buildings went through several changes during their lifetime. Some of the postholes could also be related to the earlier 19th century phase, but this is impossible to demonstrate.

In 1883, Little added to the property by purchasing 32 acres (Figure 7.4) of adjoining former Johnson land that included remains of a small dam (New Castle Deeds H 14, page 550). This was the Johnston fulling mill dam. Also on the 32 acres, near the ruined fulling mill dam, was a "tenement." Little farmed the site for the rest of his life.

Scharf (1888:923) states that Little operated a sawmill that was "almost entirely forgotten" by 1888. This statement probably, however, refers to an earlier William Little who appears with a sawmill in the 1804 assessment.

According to the 1880 census, Little had 21 acres tilled and two acres of meadow. In 1908 his executor sold the property, now grown to 59 acres, to Thomas Maclary, who had rented it from the estate.

The inventory of Little's estate reflects a small subsistence farm, with 75 chickens, two horses, and a cow. Hay was an important product for Little, worth \$20, or roughly the price of a horse. The total estate value was \$177.95.

The settlement account filed in 1908, includes sale of willow wood, which was used to make charcoal for the manufacture of black gunpowder. The estate also sold eight loads of gravel, possibly in connection with road rebuilding. Renting the farm to Maclary for the year 1907 brought \$250. The estate then paid Maclary rent, possibly on the house still occupied by family members. Contract drawings of this period, for the construction of the present road indicate that Florence Little, the widowed daughter in law, occupied the farmstead and a barn across the road (New Castle County Engineer's highway records, Delaware Archives).

The Maclary family sold it in 1920 to the Bernhards. The Bernhard heirs conveyed 21.973 acres, most of the original Little farm, to the University of Delaware in 1981.