

## **BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

### **GENERAL OVERVIEW**

The architectural resources examined in this study are situated on Centerville Road between Barley Mill Road (SR Route 259) and Campbell Road (SR 80), in Christiana Hundred, New Castle County. New Castle County is the northernmost of Delaware's three counties, and is bounded on the north by Pennsylvania, on the east by the Delaware River, on the south by Kent County, and on the west by Maryland (Conrad 1908:286).

New Castle County was originally divided into five subdivisions, or hundreds: Brandywine, New Castle, St. George's Creek, Appoquinimink, and Christiana (Conrad 1908:286). In 1710, with the addition of Pencader, Red Lion, Mill Creek, and White Clay Creek hundreds, the number of hundreds in New Castle County had increased to nine (Conrad 1908:287). Christiana Hundred is situated in northern New Castle County, in the Piedmont Zone (Herman and Siders 1989:1).

The land in this region of Delaware is generally level, with some rolling hills. The soil is a mixture of clay and loose rock which is generally fertile and well-suited to agriculture. The entire Piedmont Zone is riddled with major and minor streams, most of which flow from north to south and drain into the Christiana River. Major streams in the region include Red Clay Creek, White Clay Creek, Brandywine Creek, Pike Creek, Mill Creek, and Muddy Run. Other topographical features in Christiana Hundred include Iron and Chestnut hills, which are rich in iron ore; Mount Cuba; and the Edgar M. Hoopes Reservoir (Herman and Siders 1989:1).

### **Exploration and Frontier Settlement: 1630-1730 ±**

The earliest European settlement in the Piedmont Zone was concentrated near water transportation routes, and during the mid- to late 1600s, the early Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish settlers did not stray far from the Delaware River. After 1680, when William Penn began to make land grants to English and Welsh settlers, and as agriculture replaced an economy based on hunting and trapping, settlements began to emerge along overland transportation routes (Ames et al. 1989:45). The settlers were primarily farmers occupying homesteads of 150 to 200 acres. The majority of these farmers raised livestock, generally cattle, swine, and sheep. Field crops were also raised, primarily wheat and Indian corn (Herman and Siders 1989:1).

### **Early Industrialization: 1770-1830 ±**

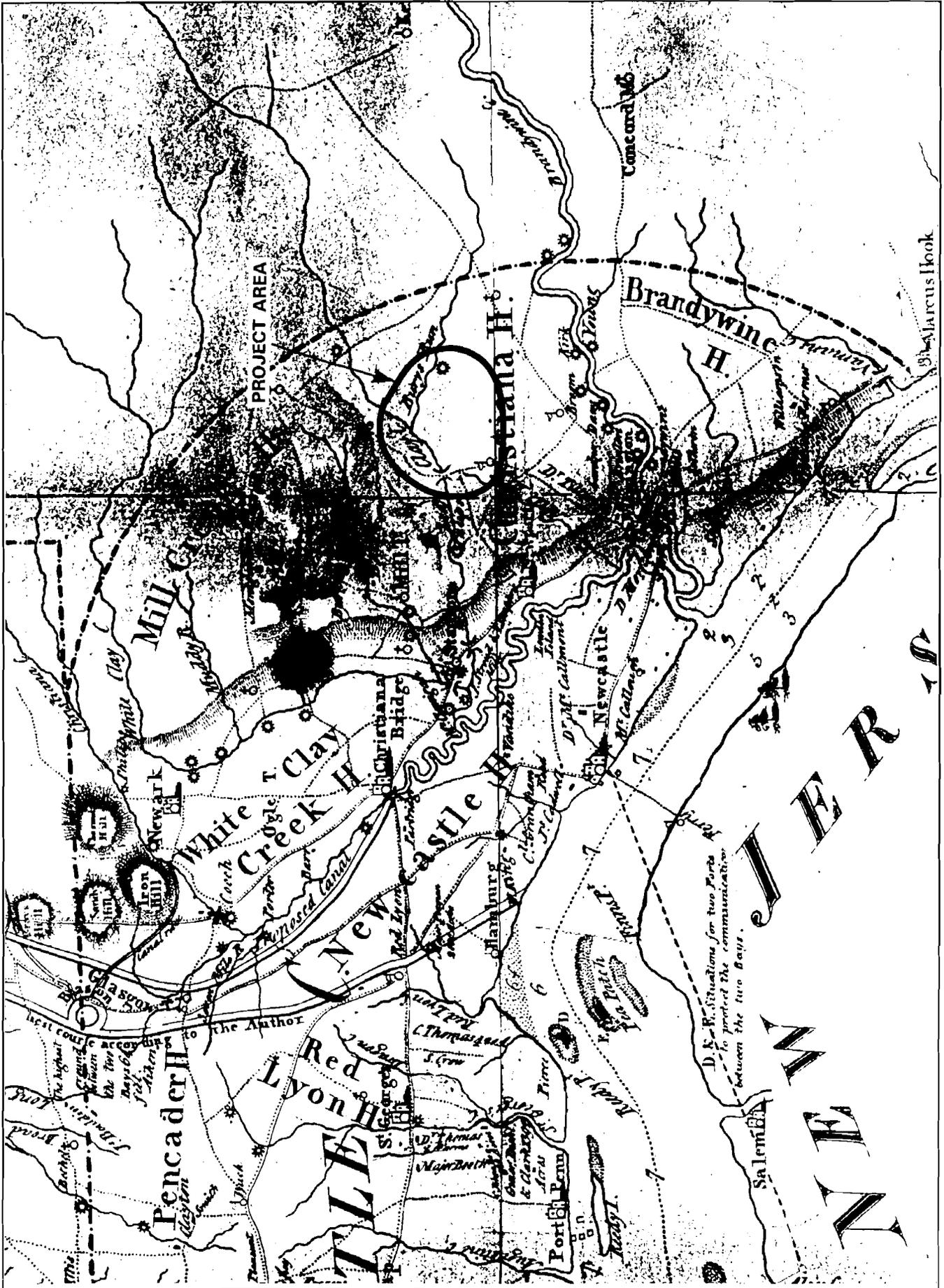
By the late eighteenth century, the Piedmont Zone had been thoroughly settled. As the population of the area increased during the early nineteenth century, farms began to decrease in size (New Castle County Department of Planning [NCCP] 1989:1-48). Although many streams were no longer navigable due to erosion caused by extensive clearing of land, these streams still

provided power for a variety of mills. The most famous mill erected in the region during this period was the DuPont powder works on the Brandywine River. Founded in 1802, it grew into one of Delaware's most important industries during the nineteenth century (Conrad 1908:421-422). Historical map evidence from 1801 shows a mill northwest of the project area, on Bury's Run (Figure 2). This may be the same site which is depicted on Heald's (1820) map as a "Manufactory." It was owned by "Mahessy," and was located near the crossroads of Campbell and Centerville roads (Figure 3). (Note: the alignment of Centerville Road in the northern part of the project area was moved east during the construction of the Edgar M. Hoopes Reservoir in the 1930s.) Although it is not shown on period maps, one landowner, William Dixon, operated a mill near the project area around 1800, as the 1803 tax assessment lists a stone gristmill among the buildings on his farm (New Castle County [NCC] Tax Assessments 1803-4).

Nucleated settlements grew up around mills and transportation junctions during this period, and Wilmington began to develop into a major urban area (Ames et al. 1989:47). A system of turnpikes was created in the county in the early 1800s, which aided farmers in bringing their products to distant markets (NCCP 1989:1-48). By the late eighteenth century, the road which in 1811 became the Kennett Turnpike (present-day SR 52) was a major north-south thoroughfare, beginning in Wilmington and extending northwest through Christiana Hundred (NCCP 1989:1-51). The road which later became known as the Newport Gap Turnpike, or more commonly, the Lancaster Turnpike (present-day SR 48), was also in use by the early 1800s. This road, which began in Wilmington, provided a direct link between Lancaster County farms and the ports of Wilmington and Newport (Spero 1991:172) (see Figures 2 and 3). It appears that by 1813, the part of Centerville Road which runs through the project area had been established, as a deed from that year refers to a "new road" leading to "the land of James McHassey" (New Castle County [NCC] Deed L-3-524). The road, which was often referred to as the Newport Road or as the road between Newport and Centerville in nineteenth-century deed records (NCC Deed A-8:251), connected Newport with Centerville, intersecting both the Lancaster and Kennett turnpikes. Both Campbell and Hillside roads also intersected the Centerville Road by that time (see Figure 3).

During the early 1800s, the economy remained agrarian. The average farm size decreased more than 30 percent, but as a result of agricultural intensification, the amount of improved land rose by 10 percent during the same period. New crops, such as clover and timothy, began to be raised (Herman and Siders 1989:8). After 1800, new industries, such as powder mills, snuff mills, tanneries, textile mills, sawmills, gristmills, and lime kilns arose in the Piedmont Zone (Herman and Siders 1989:9).

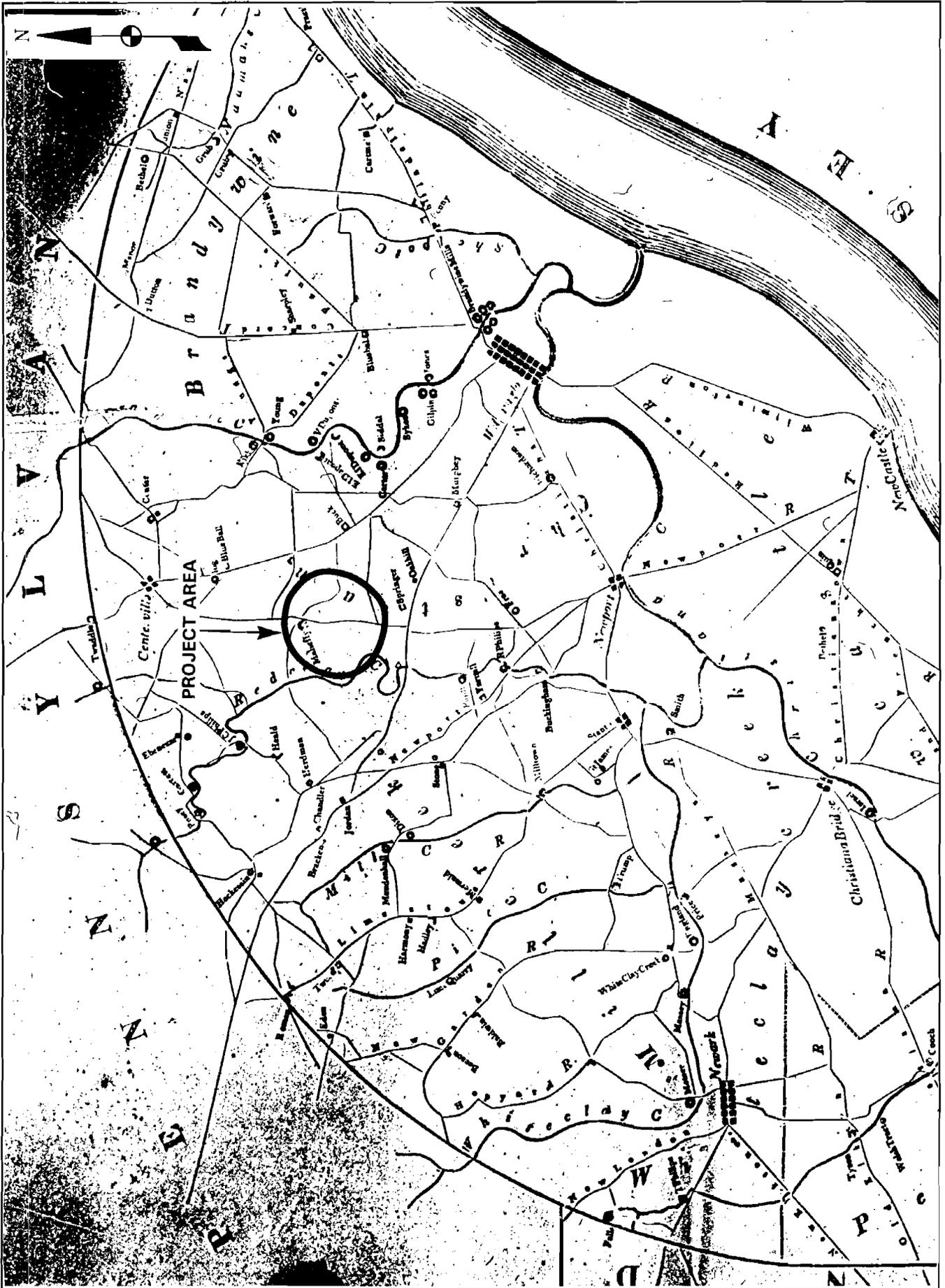
In the eighteenth century, houses in the Red Clay Valley area of the Piedmont Zone were chiefly of log construction, and later of frame construction. These houses usually had one-room or hall-and-parlor plans. During the mid-nineteenth century, log and frame construction gave way to houses built of stone (NCCP 1989:1-49). Brick houses, while also built in the area, were usually owned only by wealthy individuals (Herman 1987:2, 8).



SOURCE: Varle 1801

St. Marcus Hook

FIGURE 2: Project Area in 1801



SOURCE: Heald 1820

FIGURE 3: Project Area in 1820

### **Industrialization and Early Urbanization: 1830-1880 ±**

Farm sizes continued to decrease during this period, causing an increased need for intensive cultivation. Major farm products for the region during this period were beef and butter. Farmers also grew wheat, corn, and oats, and hay for fodder (Herman and Siders 1989:12). Farm buildings erected during this period tended to be multifunctional—for example, bank barns with stabling below (Herman and Siders 1989:14).

In 1829, the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal was completed (Reed 1947:377). This waterway was a major transportation improvement for New Castle County and its farming community. New transportation methods and routes, such as canals and railroads, became feasible in part because of the increased population pressures in settled areas and the growing demand for agricultural products (DeCunzo and Garcia 1992:212). Four railroad lines were constructed in the Piedmont Zone during this period, beginning with the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore line. This railroad, begun in 1831, made its first run between Wilmington and the Susquehanna River in 1837 (Ames et al. 1989:50; Scharf 1888:425). The Wilmington and Baltimore line came in 1869, the Wilmington and Western line in 1872, and in 1886, the Baltimore and Ohio line made its way into the region (Ames et al. 1989:50). Towns such as Newark and Greenville expanded with the railroads, and while farm size decreased, industrial activities began to dominate the economy of the county (Ames et al. 1989:50).

By 1849, there were a number of settlements located along the project corridor, including the residences of B. Hartley, O. Euchus, and J. Guest (Figure 4). Historical map evidence indicates that the project area had changed little between 1849 and 1868, showing only one additional farmstead, belonging to I.G. Pyle, located on Centerville Road within the project area (Figure 5). This farmstead is no longer extant.

During the nineteenth century, significant changes occurred in the architecture of rural New Castle County. Older frame dwellings and tenements were replaced or were rebuilt on new locations (Bowers 1987:13-14). Specifically, from 1820 to 1870, there was much remodeling of existing structures, replacement of old buildings with new ones, and substantial remodeling of recent buildings (Herman 1987:12).

### **Urbanization and Early Suburbanization: 1880-1940 ±**

During this period, farm size and total farm acreage continued to decline as farms were abandoned, giving way to suburban development. Farms during this period had decreased in size to under 100 acres, and tenant farming became more prevalent. Tenant farming remained the dominant farming practice into the twentieth century (De Cunzo and Garcia 1992:28). Map evidence from 1893 indicates that the number of dwellings in the vicinity of the project area had increased between 1868 and 1893, and some farms had been subdivided (Figure 6)

Major changes occurred in the landscape of the Piedmont Zone during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as industrialization and commercialization began to dominate the

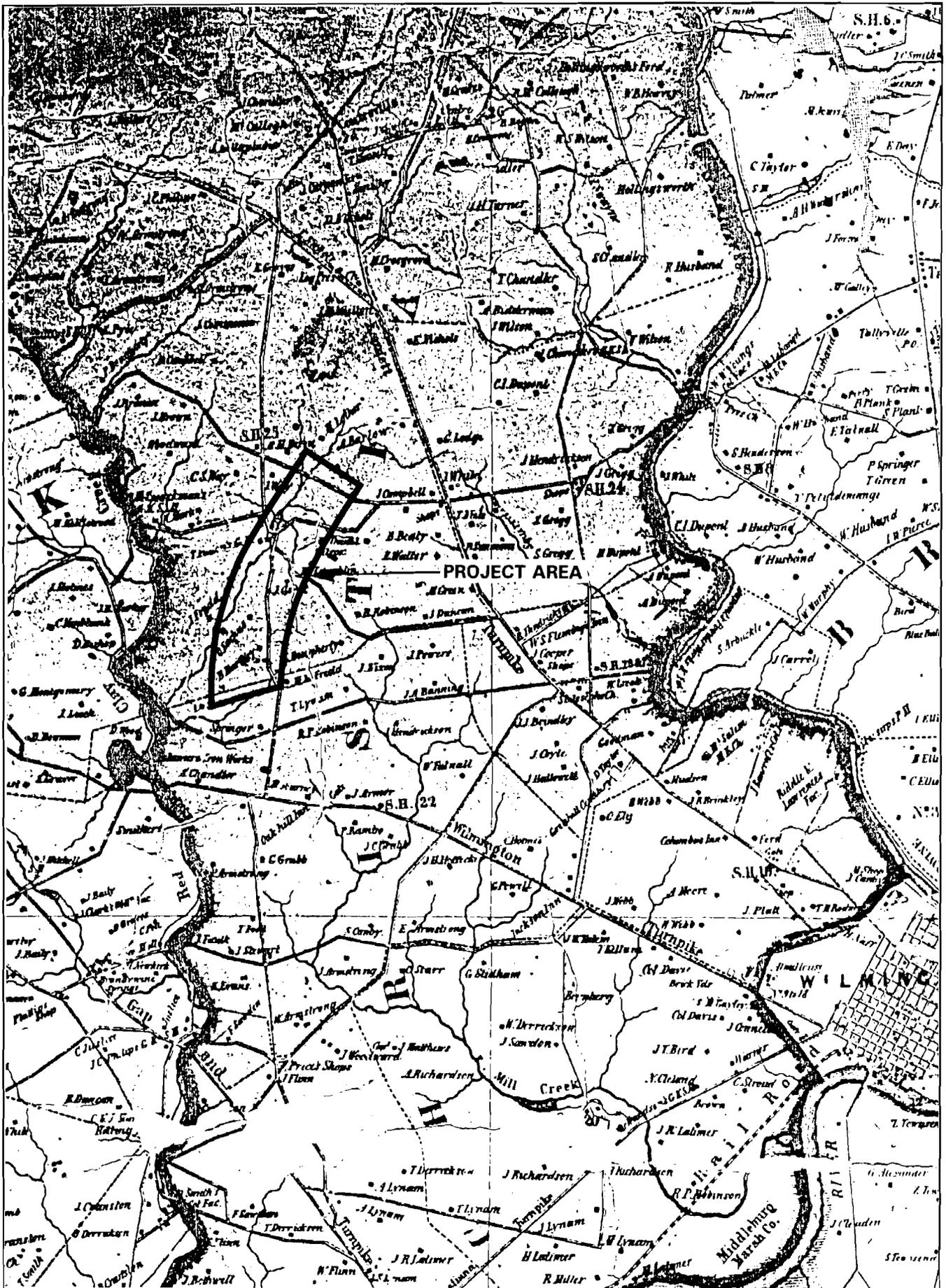


FIGURE 4: Project Area in 1849

SOURCE: Rae and Price 1849



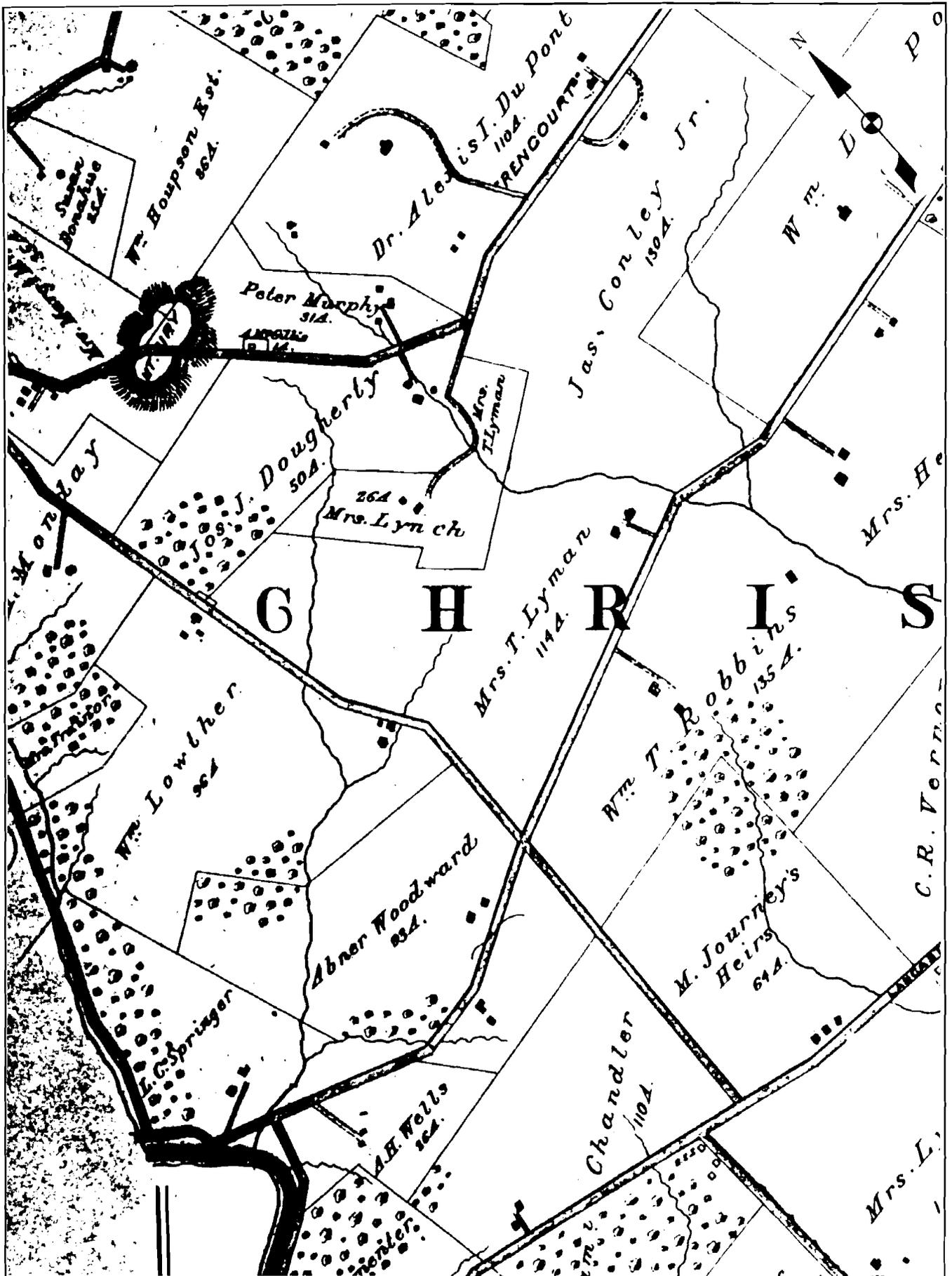


FIGURE 6: Project Area in 1893

SOURCE: Baist 1893

economy of the Piedmont Zone (De Cunzo and Garcia 1992:28). Large industries moved into Wilmington, and away from the natural power sources such as creeks. As these industries moved to the city, suburban expansion, led by a growing professional middle class, began. In association with suburban development, roads were improved to accommodate the automobile, and mass transit was developed (Ames et al. 1989:51).

An important event associated with increased urbanization and suburbanization in the vicinity of the project area was the construction of the Edgar M. Hoopes Reservoir. The reservoir was begun in 1926 by its contractor, John J. Walsh, and completed in 1932. Located immediately west of the project area, the placement of the reservoir sparked the development of a number of early twentieth-century country estates which were constructed along its shores. Most of the land now occupied by the reservoir was owned by Senator Thomas Coleman DuPont. Although it is not clear exactly what role Thomas Coleman DuPont played in the construction of the reservoir and subsequent suburbanization of the area, he did own most of the land now covered by the reservoir, as well as a large amount of land along the relocated Centerville Road. The Hoopes Reservoir was originally named the Old Mill Dam, after DuPont's homestead, which was called "Old Mill" (Silliman 1962:98). DuPont appears to have taken the opportunity provided by the construction of the reservoir to begin selling his land as residential parcels after the reservoir was completed (Delaware Historical Society 1926-1982). Many of these estates were built by the owners of profitable factories and mills in the city, who began purchasing large tracts of land west of Wilmington. These included members of the DuPont family, and other executives employed by the DuPont industries, as well as such men as William Alexander Worth, of the Worth Steel Company (Bevan 1929:81; Herman and Siders 1989:17).

After the 1950s, the population of Wilmington, which had grown rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, began to decline. Suburban New Castle County, however, has continued to grow throughout the late twentieth century (Ames et al. 1989:51).

## **PREVIOUS ARCHITECTURAL SURVEYS**

The earliest architectural survey within the project area was the *Junior League Historic Buildings Census*, which was completed in 1962. This survey, which only included buildings built prior to 1850, recorded two properties within the project area of potential effect. These were G-6, the Half-Century House, which is designated in the DESHPO files as N-522; and G-17, which is designated in the DESHPO files as N-524 (DESHPO Files; Junior League 1962). In 1989, the New Castle County Department of Planning prepared *The Red Clay Valley Scenic River and Highway Study*, which identified four resources within or adjacent to the project area of potential effect: N-521, Westbrae, a Colonial Revival-style mansion on Hillside Road; N-524, the William Dickson House, a circa-1790 stone house; N-525, the B. Hartley House, an early nineteenth-century stone house; and N-526, the William Lowther Farm, a mid- to late nineteenth-century farmstead (NCCP 1989).

Cultural resource survey files at the DESHPO identify seven historic properties within or adjacent to the project area of potential effect. These include the above-mentioned properties

N-521, N-522, N-524, N-525, and N-526, and, in addition, N-523, a springhouse and storage tank on Centerville Road which was associated with the Westbrae Water Company; and N-7681, a Colonial Revival-style house on Campbell Road (DESHPO Files).

The *Delaware Historic Bridges Survey and Evaluation*, undertaken in 1991, did not identify any bridges within the project area of potential effect (Spero 1991).

Research at the DESHPO revealed that no structures within or adjacent to the project area are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

## **THE DELAWARE COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN**

The *Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* (Ames et al. 1989) defines five geographic zones for the State of Delaware, identifying important themes and property types likely to be found within each zone. The Centerville Road project area, situated in Christiana Hundred, is located in the Piedmont Zone. The architectural resources identified within the project area fall into three chronological periods: Early Industrialization: 1770-1830 ±; Industrialization and Early Urbanization: 1830-1880 ±; and Urbanization and Early Suburbanization: 1880-1940 ±. For these resources, the most applicable themes are Architecture, Engineering, and Decorative Arts; Agriculture; Transportation and Communication; and Major Families, Individuals, and Events (Ames et al. 1989).

The *Delaware Historic Context Master Reference and Summary* (Herman and Siders 1989) states that historic landscapes and cultural resources are highly threatened in this zone. The survival rates for historic resources in the Piedmont Zone during the period of Early Industrialization: 1770-1830 ±, are good for dwellings, workers' housing, taverns, and major architectural buildings, but poor for millseats and mills. Resources within the period of Industrialization and Early Urbanization: 1830-1880 ±, are also threatened by zone-wide high-density development, and "while many structures with high levels of integrity and significance remain and require critical review on issues of material integrity, rarity, physical condition, and areas of significance, it is important to recognize that they are uniformly endangered" (Herman and Siders 1989:12). Within the period of Urbanization and Early Suburbanization: 1880-1940 ±, survival rates for resources related to early suburbanization are excellent, while those resources relating to agriculture and manufacturing are currently endangered, and require the same level of evaluation as property types from the period of Industrialization and Early Urbanization (Herman and Siders 1989:15).