

CHAPTER 5

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Exploration and Frontier Settlement, 1630-1730

European settlement in Delaware commenced in the early 1630s with the creation of a Dutch patroonship on the western side of Delaware Bay in the vicinity of present-day Lewes. A small whaling station known as Swanendael was established here in 1631, but within a couple of years this was abandoned, following conflict with the local Indians. Towards the end of the decade, a Dutch-Swedish trading enterprise established a more permanent presence in the Wilmington area, following the construction of Fort Christina in 1638. While the Dutch involvement in the area initially declined, Swedish and, to a lesser extent, Finnish settlement gradually took root, being characterized by scattered farmsteads along the principal drainages flowing into the Delaware River from below the Christina River to the mouth of the Schuylkill (Munroe 1984:15-25; De Cunzo and Catts 1990:27-29).

In the early 1650s, the Dutch sought to establish their dominance over the Lower Delaware and erected a fort, named Fort Casimir, on the site of present-day New Castle. After sporadic skirmishing and political maneuvering, the Dutch eventually succeeded in exercising control over the Swedish-settled areas in 1655. However, even with Dutch rule, the Wilmington area remained strongly Swedish in a cultural sense. For example, a distinctive measure of Swedish settlement in the area was the preference for log-constructed houses. The period of Dutch control was also short-lived which probably also helped to preserve the Swedish influence, for in 1664, following the fall of New Amsterdam, the English took over all Dutch holdings in the Middle Atlantic region (Weslager 1961; Munroe 1984:24-44; De Cunzo and Catts 1990:29-30).

In the late 1660s and early 1670s, there was a gradual transference of political power from the Dutch to the English. A brief hiatus in this process took place in 1673-74 when the Dutch recaptured many of their former New World possessions from the English during the third Anglo-Dutch War, but the latter soon re-established control of the Lower Delaware Valley region. From the late 1670s onwards new settlement resumed with a stronger English flavor, boosted in 1682 when proprietary rights to Delaware were granted to William Penn. With Penn's involvement the colonization process and economic growth in Delaware became tied more closely to Philadelphia and neighboring Pennsylvania. Wheat, replacing the earlier crops of rye, barley and tobacco, was milled locally and marketed in Philadelphia. Lumber in the Lower Delaware Valley was similarly milled locally and shipped throughout the region. Most farmsteads were situated within eight miles or a half-day's journey of a mill or shipping wharf (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:30-35).

B. Intensified and Durable Occupation, 1730-1770

The later colonial period was one of settlement consolidation and intensification of agriculture. Between 1725 and the mid-1750s, large numbers of English and Scotch-Irish arrived in the three Lower Counties, most of these immigrants being Quakers, Presbyterians or Methodists, and many being indentured servants. Other European groups and African slaves were also represented in these population movements. Between 80% and 90% of the Lower Counties population was engaged in agriculture. Philadelphia remained the principal economic hub of the region, but secondary market towns and small port communities also developed (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:41-51).

Wilmington was by far the largest urban center in the Delaware colony that developed during this period. Chartered in 1739, it soon became a port of entry and a post town and was an important link in the Philadelphia trading network. Of special significance to the borough's location was its proximity to the Brandywine mills. Wilmington was a receiving center for local and regional farm produce, brought by water from small villages, such as Cantell's Bridge, Duck Creek, Christiana, Newport, Stanton, St. Georges and Dover or overland from southeastern Pennsylvania. It was then shipped up the Delaware River to Philadelphia. In the Lower Peninsula, Lewes continued to be the major town in the region (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:43-44).

During this period, waterways were vital for transportation and commerce as early roads were few in number and usually in poor condition. The few roads that did exist were keyed to landings on navigable rivers and along the Delaware Bay shoreline, from where produce and goods could be shipped more efficiently by water transport. In the vicinity of the Puncheon Run project corridor, there were at least four landings in existence during the 18th century (see below Chapter 12, Section A) -- two of them situated along the lower section of Walker's Branch (today's Puncheon Run) and the other two located on the west bank of the St. Jones River, a short distance upstream of its confluence with Walker's Branch. From this area, goods could be easily shipped downstream along the St. Jones River to the Delaware Bay and distributed elsewhere within the region and overseas. The Lower Delaware River and Delaware Bay served as a major focus of water transportation throughout the historical period because the majority of Delaware's navigable streams flow eastward into this drainage. For this reason, the port city of Philadelphia and, to a lesser extent, the port communities of Wilmington and New Castle, exerted a powerful commercial influence on the Lower Counties. All three of these ports, as well as Lewes, were important destinations for ocean-going vessels involved in the import-export trade (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:44-45).

As the 18th century wore on, the condition of the roads in the hinterland gradually improved. From Wilmington, roads radiated west, south and north connecting the Delaware River with, respectively, the head of the Chesapeake Bay (Head of Elk), Kent and Sussex Counties, and southeastern Pennsylvania. The principal road passing through Delaware during this period was the King's Highway, which was in existence as an informal route by the end of the 17th century, and which became officially established by an act of the General Assembly in 1752. The King's

Highway ran south from Wilmington through New Castle, Christiana and on to Dover. From Dover it continued southward along present-day State Street (U.S. Route 13A) to a point about 500 feet north of Walker's Branch. It then turned southeast along the course of present-day U.S. Route 113A, crossing over Walker's Branch, and continued on towards Lewes. Within the project vicinity this latter route was known during the colonial period as the "Road to Fork Landing" (Fork Landing being a small community near present-day Lebanon). From Lewes, the King's Highway continued south to the Maryland settlements on the eastern shore (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:45).

Another early road within the project vicinity was the "Forrest Road to Dover." This route, which commenced just north of where the King's Highway crossed over Walker's Branch, was probably established around the same time that the King's Highway was becoming formalized. From this point, it headed southwest, crossing over Walker's Branch about 200 feet downstream (southeast) from where Governors Avenue presently crosses the creek. After crossing the river it continued in a southwesterly direction towards Camden. During the 19th century this road was known as the "Road to Camden." Today, portions of Governors Avenue and U.S. Route 13A (south of Puncheon Run) follow the general course of this early road.

Farming remained by far the most important economic activity in the Lower Counties during the later colonial period and typically involved a mix of crop cultivation and livestock raising, supported by a few larger agricultural processing facilities, such as gristmills, fulling mills and tanneries, and various types of home-based manufacturing activity, such as spinning, weaving and malting. Wheat was the primary grain crop that was grown, followed by rye, corn, barley and oats. Other important farming activities included the tending of orchards and the growing of fruits and garden vegetables. The main varieties of livestock raised were cattle, hogs and sheep. As the acreage of improved agricultural land gradually increased, patterns of rural settlement and land use became more expansive, and the landscape took on an appearance -- characterized by dispersed farms and small hamlets -- that, in many parts of the state, continues to this day (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:45-47).

Along with the expanding agrarian landscape, the placement of farms within the countryside became more road-oriented and farmstead layouts adopted a range of regular -- usually linear or rectilinear -- patterns. Beginning in the 1740s, formal Georgian architectural influences also began to appear in many farmhouses, and more permanent methods of building construction were utilized. The range of outbuildings in the farmscape also reflected the changes in agriculture, with a general disappearance of tobacco sheds, the introduction of larger and more durable granaries and barns, and the appearance of structures related to home manufacturing, such as weaving houses (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:49). Within the project vicinity, examples of these agricultural trends may be seen in the mid-18th-century malting operation at the Dawson House Site and the fulling mill built sometime between 1756 and 1779 by Thomas Nixon (see below, Chapters 10 and 11).

Although not represented in the St. Jones River drainage, another important industry that flourished briefly in the Lower Counties during the later colonial period was iron manufacture. Beginning in the 1760s, several iron furnaces and plantations were established along the Nanticoke, Gravelly Branch and Deep Creek drainages to process bog ore dug from the swamps and wetlands. These industrial facilities required large quantities of charcoal and wood for their operation, virtually all of which was drawn from the extensive surrounding tracts of timber. Most of these furnaces had ceased production by the beginning of the American Revolution (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:49-50).

Overall, the settlement pattern during the second and third quarters of the 18th century shifted away from the river-oriented plantation to a more inland, road-based focus. This trend was due in part to a shift away from tobacco agriculture to grain agriculture in southern Delaware and to the fact that most easily accessible riverfront and bayfront property was taken up early on in the settlement process. Grain agriculture required more extensive land clearing and planting, thus forcing a movement further inland that required more flexibility in dwelling and farmstead location. This change in settlement orientation has been suggested as the context within which many historic sites were established along the St. Jones River in Kent County during the mid-18th century (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:50-51).

C. Transformation from Colony to State, 1770-1830

The social and economic life of Delaware inhabitants was considerably disrupted during the Revolutionary War, with the British blockading shipping and conducting raids along the shores of the Delaware Bay. Several military campaigns crossed the boundaries of Delaware during the war, although serious military conflict was confined chiefly to the Piedmont and Upper Peninsula regions. Sporadic skirmishing took place in New Castle County during the fall of 1777. In the winter of 1777-78, Wilmington was occupied first by British forces and then by American forces. Further military activity occurred in the area in the summer of 1781 when Washington's army passed through New Castle County en route to Yorktown (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:51-52). No Revolutionary War military activity is documented in the immediate vicinity of the project corridor.

In the early Federal period (*circa* 1780-1810), Delaware history was characterized by a rapid growth in population and a relative decline in agricultural productivity. In an effort to increase their crop and livestock yields, many farmers cleared and improved marginal land, but to little avail, and there was a noticeable out-migration of farmers to the west in the 1820s and 1830s. Many of the smaller, less profitable farms in the Upper Peninsula and Piedmont regions of the state thus became absorbed by the larger wealthier plantations. Commerce and industry fared somewhat better than agriculture, and there was an increase and diversification in water-powered milling during this period, spurred in part by the technological improvements of innovative millwrights like Oliver Evans of Newport. Transportation improvements, chiefly the turnpikes and the construction of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, facilitated the process of urbanization

in many locations, although the canal, by simplifying shipping of goods between the Delaware and Chesapeake, actually contributed to the decline of a number of the towns in the Upper Peninsula (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:51-64).

D. Industrialization and Capitalization, 1830-1880

During this period Delaware began to experience far-reaching and complex change owing to major external forces (industrialization, urbanization, and transportation improvements) that were affecting the United States as a whole. Philadelphia's influence over the state's economy began to be challenged by the rise of Baltimore as a regional and industrial center. Agriculture diversified to include an increased emphasis on dairying and fruit and vegetable growing, and also underwent many important changes in areas such as drainage techniques, mechanization and the use of fertilizers. Towards the end of the period, to maintain profitability, Delaware agriculture became increasingly specialized and export crop production declined substantially. An important factor in agricultural specialization and in the growth of manufacturing in the state was the development of the railroad network from the late 1830s onwards. The railroads cemented Wilmington's position as the state's pre-eminent manufacturing and commercial center, but also stimulated the growth of towns and villages throughout the Lower Delaware Valley (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:64-77).

The Delaware Railroad Company was incorporated in 1836. Construction of this line commenced in 1852 and was completed in 1859. It traveled almost the entire length of the state from Delmar in southwestern Delaware to the existing line of the New Castle & Frenchtown Railroad in the north. This latter line was in place by 1832 and linked what became known as Delaware Junction with the town of New Castle (Baer 1981). The course of the Delaware Railroad in the project vicinity is depicted on the Byles map of Kent County in 1859 (Figure 5.1). En route to Dover from the south, this line crossed Walker's Branch approximately three-quarters of a mile to the west of the project corridor. The map notes that Walker's Branch was by this time being called Puncheon Run and also shows that a fairly complex secondary road network was already in existence in the Dover region. By this time a north-south road had been constructed along the east side of the St. Jones River, a route that is today followed by U.S. Route 113. The old King's Highway and the "Road to Camden" are both shown on the opposite (west) side of the St. Jones River near the western end of the project corridor. The Beers map of the State of Delaware published in 1868 (Figure 5.2) shows essentially the same road network within the project vicinity as the Byles map, a situation that did not substantially change until the first quarter of the 20th century (Figure 5.3).

E. Urbanization and Suburbanization, 1880-1940

From the final quarter of the 19th century through into the mid-20th century, Delaware saw continued population growth, agricultural specialization, an increase in manufacturing activity, expanding towns, and the emerging influence of the automobile on economic activity and settlement patterns. The dominant trends of urbanization and suburbanization affected the northern part of the state in particular, such that New Castle County at the turn of the century contained almost 60% of the population. The two more southerly counties, Kent and Sussex, remained in contrast essentially rural, their economies being based chiefly on market gardening. The produce for the most part was marketed in the region's major urban centers, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Wilmington (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:77-86). In the late 19th century, peaches were an important crop in Kent and Sussex Counties, but their primacy was challenged by apples in the early 20th century. Orchards were generally established on land formerly used for small grains. After about 1930 the acreage of orchard land decreased markedly (Matthew and Ireland 1971:2).

Within the project vicinity several major highway improvements resulted from the growth of Dover as the bureaucratic hub of the state and from increasing use of the automobile. In 1919, the portion of the King's Highway within the project vicinity was widened and straightened as part of an improvement project extending from Cooper's Corner to Magnolia and became designated as part of U.S. Route 113A. Construction plans for U.S. Route 113A in 1919 (Figure 5.4) show the King's Highway as it existed prior to the improvements. No buildings are depicted within the project corridor. Lydia C. Maloney is shown as the property owner on the west side of the highway; George Pyott is given as the owner on the east side. In 1922, the uppermost portion of the "Road to Camden" was straightened between Cooper's Corner and Cooper Estates Road (Heite and Heite 1986). The small section of the "Road to Camden" located on the north side of Puncheon Run between U.S. Route 13A and Puncheon Run is today known as the "Old Camden Dover Road."

In 1934, on the opposite (east) side of the St. Jones River, the section of U.S. Route 113 between Dover and what used to be known as Devils Hill underwent similar improvements. Devils Hill was formerly located at the intersection of U.S. Route 113 and State Route 9. Construction plans for U.S. Route 113 in 1934 (Figure 5.5) show only one building within the project corridor. This building, located on the west side of the highway, consisted of a two-story frame house owned by William Richter. On the opposite side of the highway, "J.H. Richter" is shown as the owner of a parcel of apparently vacant land.

In the early 1950s the Delaware State Highway Department began to formulate plans for a new road that would bypass Dover. This road, known as the Dover By-Pass, is present-day U.S. Route 13. The bypass began on the south side of town where the old "Road to Camden" crossed Isaac's Branch and traveled in a northeasterly direction looping round to the southeast of Dover

until it met up with U.S. Route 113 about 1,000 feet to the southeast of Lockerman Street. Within the project vicinity, construction plans for U.S. Route 13 prepared in 1950 show that this new road, as initially designed, would have clipped the southwestern portion of a horse track (Figure 5.6a). In fact, the track was improperly located on the plan and the road was actually constructed further to the northwest, avoiding it. It is not clear whether the rest of the buildings located nearby are properly located, but if they are, the plans indicate two buildings located within the project corridor (in Area A), both to the north of the race track. The larger of the two buildings was probably a barn and the other is labeled as a frame shop (Figure 5.6a). Samuel Berkman, a local resident, is shown as the owner of the property (Figure 5.6b). The new highway crossed Puncheon Run over a new two-cell box culvert. The small section of the "Road to Camden" (today known as the "Old Camden Dover Road") between U.S. Route 13A and Puncheon Run was noted at this time as being "abandoned." The earlier bridge site was evidently no longer in use and a barrier was placed at the end of the road near the river.

In 1958, both U.S. Routes 113A and 113 underwent further improvement. U.S. Route 113A was resurfaced and a new two-lane highway was built in place of the existing one-lane U.S. Route 113 carriageway. The construction plans for U.S. Route 113A in 1958 (Figure 5.7) show that as part of the resurfacing project a new box culvert was to be constructed to carry the road over Puncheon Run. The construction plans for U.S. Route 113 in 1958 (Figure 5.8) show that there were now three buildings located on the west side of the highway within the project corridor (Area C). They consisted of two frame dwellings and a produce stand, all on the property of William Richter (see below Chapter 12, Sections D and E). On the eastern side of the highway (Area D), the plan shows that the land contained a cherry orchard.