

6.0 HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Two proposed districts—the Beach Highway Historic District and the U.S. 113 Wardway Historic District—are evaluated in this report. One property (S-08733.047) that could be part of a larger historic district for Ellendale is indirectly affected by the proposed project and is evaluated in this report, although the possible district is not. The Ellendale Historic District has never been formally documented or evaluated, and it is beyond the scope of the current project to do so here.

The Ellendale Historic District was proposed in 1992 based solely on Criterion C as a “good collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings in the community” (Bashman 1992). According to DelSHPO, no formal DOE was ever filed for the district, but it has been treated as eligible for the purposes of Section 106 reviews (Davis 2006). The mapping for the district has not been formalized. The 1992 letter proposing the district includes a highly generalized map that includes properties on both sides of Main Street, south along State Street, and north along West State Road. A GIS shapefile dated February 2005 on file at DelSHPO shows three discontinuous polygons that cover parcels throughout Ellendale, including the one containing S-08733.047. Should an Ellendale Historic District be formalized in a National Register nomination and concurred upon as eligible by DelSHPO (or be treated as eligible for purposes of Section 106 reviews), JMA recommends that the formal district boundary exclude S-08733.047 for reasons stated in the individual evaluation (see Section 5.0 of this report).

Beach Highway Historic District (Detail Map #2)

Description: This small, predominantly African American, community is located on the south side of Beach Highway (Highway 16), east of and not far from its intersection with U.S. 113. A total of eleven dwellings stand within this district, including S-03890, S-03961, S-03962, S-11464, and S-11897 through S-11902. Two vacant lots are located within the boundary, located toward the western end.

The proposed district is located to the west of downtown, a little over one-tenth of a mile from West State Road. It is distinct from the town of Ellendale both physically and developmentally, and is therefore considered separately from a possible Ellendale Historic District. Whereas Ellendale originated in the late 1860s as a small planned community reliant on the railroad, the houses along Beach Highway reflect the later trend of “string” type residential development on streets between downtowns and the Dupont Highway, which bypassed the towns.

The resources within the community are both small and large, one- to two-story wood-framed dwellings that range in date from c. 1880 to the 1960s. Architecturally, the styles/types include an I-house, hall-and-parlors, ranchers, and vernacular bungalows. One of the buildings on the westernmost property (S-11897) appears to have once served as a roadside stand, but all of the other properties are strictly residential. With the exception of the two end properties, the lots are all rectangular-shaped properties of approximately one-quarter acre each. The property at the western end of the district is a little larger, approximately one-half acre, and the property at the eastern end, a triangular-shaped, corner property located at the intersection of Sharon Road and Beach Highway, comprises approximately one acre.

Each of the properties within the Beach Highway Historic District has been individually evaluated for National Register eligibility under this study. At this time, none of the resources has been recommended as individually eligible for listing.

Applicable Historic Context(s): Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp Zone; Urbanization and Early Suburbanization 1880-1940+/-, Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization 1940-1960+/-; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes theme; African American settlement property type.

Historic Overview: According to a local resident, all the dwellings along the south side of Beach Highway, between U.S. 113 and Sharon Road, have been extant in their current locations since the mid-twentieth-century. The majority are occupied by African Americans, and are believed to always have been. In recent years (c. 2000-present) nearly all the homes have undergone renovations and improvements, funded by government grant monies (Truxon 2008).

In a review of historic-period aerial photographs of the area, the only dwelling in this vicinity in 1937 appears to have been the former farmstead at the corner of Beach Highway and Sharon Road. According to the current mayor of Ellendale, this house was moved to this location (Price 2008), but this has not been confirmed. By 1954 two additional dwellings appear west of the corner property. Based on architectural evidence, the cores of these two homes appear to have been constructed around the turn of the century. Mayor Price (2008) reported that several houses to the west of the corner house were also moved to their current locations, which is supported by the aerial photograph and architectural evidence. By 1961 a string of approximately seven more houses appear further west, all of which were probably built in-place.

Evaluation: This potential district was evaluated as an African American settlement, following guidelines identified by Bradley Skelcher (1995) and refined by A.D. Marble for the U.S. 301 corridor study in northern Delaware (Frederick et al. 2006). The development of African American neighborhoods and settlements is a significant social and land-use trend in twentieth-century Sussex County, and at least two others have been documented for the U.S. 113 study (Dickerson Chapel-Handy Road and McCabe Court in the Millsboro study area). Skelcher identifies the following necessary elements of an African American rural community: a church, a school, residential buildings, and a building that served a commercial function. Other resources from the period of significance would contribute to the community but are not minimally required; these include a cemetery, residential outbuildings, building(s) that housed a source of employment, and community/fraternal organization affiliated building(s). These communities can extend up to 1.5 miles in size (Skelcher 1995:147). Frederick et al. (2006:145) cite the following elements as necessary for an African American community to be historically significant: African American institutions (churches or schools); retention of rural setting; at least two documented residential dwellings associated with the African American community; and presence of other associated features such as agricultural landscapes/buildings, commercial buildings, and religious landscapes such as a baptism pond or cemetery. JMA has noted that the presence of older buildings that have been moved into the neighborhood also appears to be characteristic of Delaware's mid-twentieth-century African American neighborhoods, at least in southern Sussex County.

Other than the small roadside stand at the western end of the district, which probably served passing automobile traffic, the relocation of dwellings appears to be the only feature of the Beach Highway area that is characteristic of an African American settlement. The district lacks all other diagnostic components identified by both Skelcher (1995) and Frederick et al. (2006), including a school, a church, a commercial building, a cemetery, or a clear source of employment. Rather than being a cohesive community, Beach Highway is simply a road-front development established on former farmland at the outskirts of Ellendale. As a district, Beach Highway lacks the focus and complexity of a potentially eligible African American settlement, and it is therefore recommended not eligible under Criterion A.

Limited research has not identified a connection between the district and any individual significant in the history of the local area. Therefore, it is recommended not eligible under Criterion B.

The eleven dwellings that constitute the district were evaluated under Criterion C as components of a historic district, defined by the National Register as a "significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction" (U.S. Department of the Interior 1991). The district does not possess the cohesiveness required of an eligible historic district; the individual buildings, of varying dates and styles, lack any evident architectural linkage. Additionally, none of the properties possesses individual significance, and have all undergone a moderate to high degree of alterations over the years, diminishing their integrity. Therefore, the Beach Highway historic district is recommended not eligible under Criterion C, for its architecture.

The buildings in this district represent common examples of wood framing and are not likely to provide new information on this construction type that is not already available through other means; therefore it is not likely to be eligible under Criterion D.

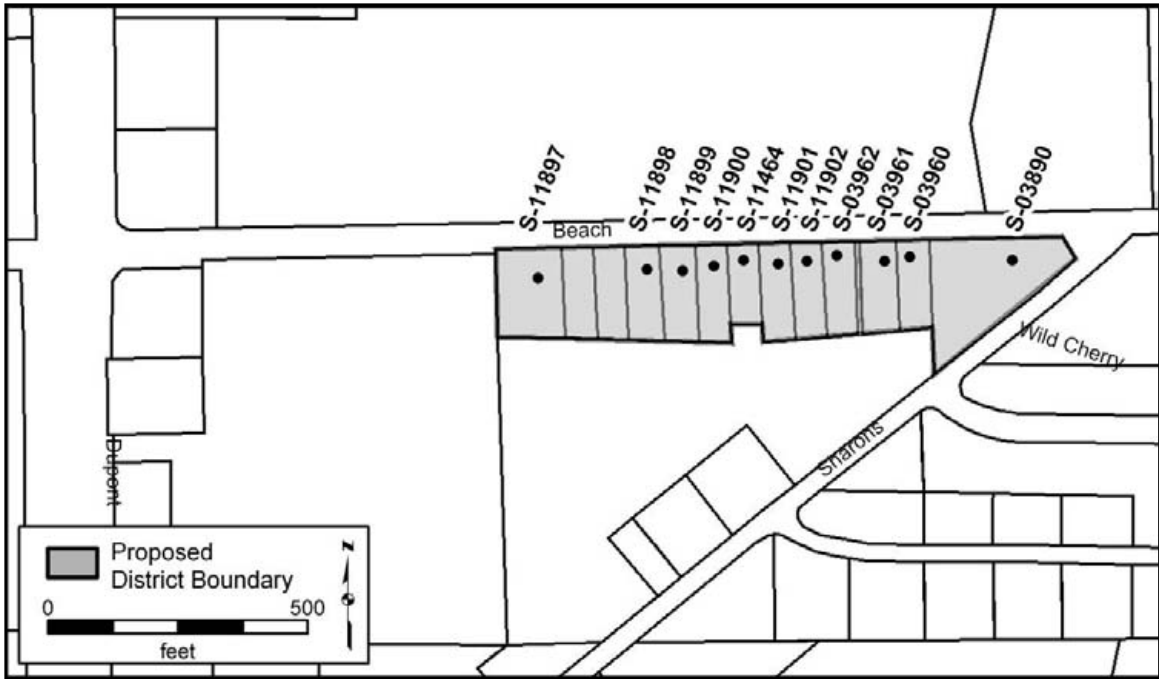
Beach Highway Historic District



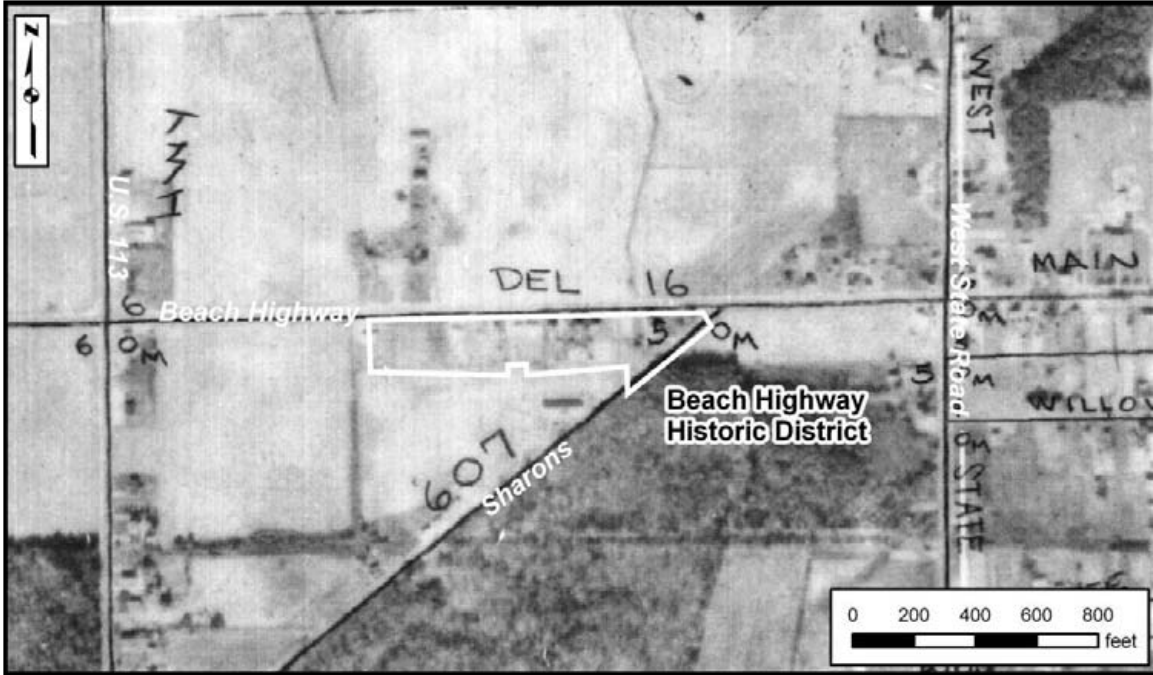
Beach Road streetscape, with S-11902 and S-03962 visible from right to left; view to SE



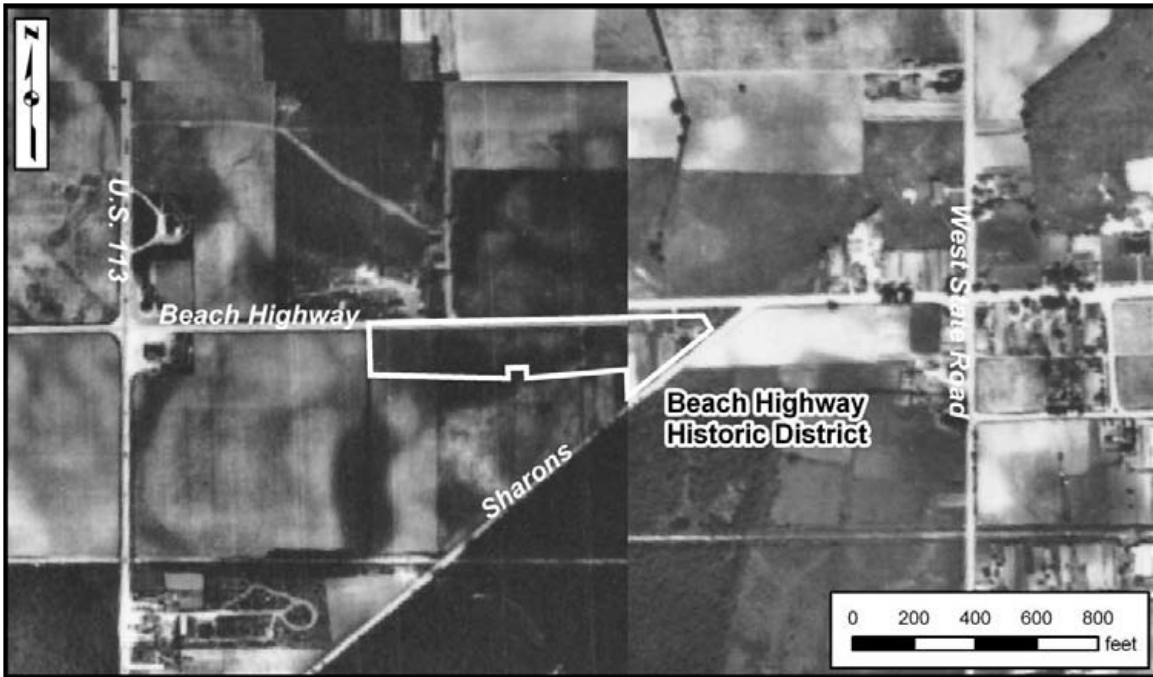
Beach Road streetscape, with S-11900 visible on the left; view to SW



(2003 aerial)



(1962 aerial)



(1937 aerial)

U.S. 113 Wardway District (Detail Map #2)

Description: According to a local informant who talked to JMA surveyors when they were recording properties in the area, the row of houses along U.S. 113 between the Milton-Ellendale Road and Sharons Road resulted from the subdivision of a large farm parcel in the 1930s. The informant told JMA surveyors that each of the parcels was improved with a kit-house from Montgomery Ward.

There are currently seven parcels with historic-period houses along this stretch of the road: S-08579 through S-08583, S-11467, and S-11468. (The southernmost property, S-08574, was not part of this development, according to the informant, and is therefore not included in the proposed district.) All seven houses date between 1930 and 1940; five are bungalows, one is a Colonial Revival, and one is a World War II-era cottage. Only two of the bungalows—S-08579 and S-08583, both of which are clipped-gable front—appear to match. The remaining five houses are dissimilar from one another, and may have been added to the landscape at different times.

As seen in aerial photographs, the farm was intact in 1937 with clusters of buildings along U.S. 113 (some of which appear to have been chicken houses) as well as fields and drives. By 1954 the farm buildings were gone and the strip of houses was present. One historic-period house, on the lot between S-08579 and S-08580, has since been replaced by a modern dwelling. Two additional houses were present to the north of the extant strip, but have since been removed.

Montgomery Ward, the Chicago-based retailer, began introducing plan books in 1910, initially featuring outdated turn-of-the-century designs possibly by the noted pattern book designer William Radford. Research has indicated that Wards never owned or operated housing production facilities. Instead, the houses appear to have been actually manufactured by Gordon-Van Tine of Bay City, Michigan, a leading seller of pre-cut homes. In 1921, the company took over Wards mail order housing department and sale of entire pre-cut homes began. The brand name used was “Wardway Homes,” sold from 1922 until 1931 featuring the “ready-cut” system. The homes were identical to Gordon-Van Tine houses from the corresponding years; only the model names and prices differed.

Applicable Historic Context(s): Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp Zone; Suburbanization and Early Ex-urbanization 1940-1960+/-; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Changes theme; farmland subdivision property type

Evaluation: This district is an example of farmland subdivision, a major land-use trend in many agricultural areas of the eastern United States driven in part by family considerations and in part by agricultural economics. Farmland subdivision is normally recognizable on the landscape in a farm featuring its original nineteenth- or twentieth-century farmhouse with adjoining later dwellings on smaller lots. In this case, the strip of road-front properties was added in the 1930s, but the original farmhouse does not appear to be extant. While individual examples of farmland subdivision rarely possess historic significance, a coherent collection of properties of known provenance might, particularly if the houses were all kit-houses from the same retailer.

The U.S. 113 Wardway Historic District is intriguing for this reason, but the origin of the houses is far from certain. Some indication of Wardway designs can be found in two readily accessible catalogs from 1925 and 1931 (Montgomery Ward & Company 1925, 1931). Although several of the houses in this row are similar to Wardway designs, none is a sufficiently close match to

definitely indicate that it was constructed as a pre-cut house. Additionally, all of the houses appear to postdate the latest Wardway offerings of 1931. Unfortunately, Gordon-Van Tine records appear to be scarce, so any possible connection to that company's house production, which continued to 1945, is speculative.

Without a clear association to the original farmstead, and lacking a secure connection to Wardway or Van Tine, this collection of houses becomes just another residential strip along U.S. 113, with nothing to distinguish it from other such strips from this period. The replacement of the house on one of the central parcels with a modern structure has broken the continuity of the streetscape, and alterations to many of the individual houses (e.g., porch enclosures, replacement windows and siding, additions, etc.) have compromised the district's integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Lacking demonstrable historical significance and with diminished architectural integrity, this district is recommended not eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C.

Limited research has not identified a connection between the district and any individual significant in the history of the local area. Therefore, it is recommended not eligible under Criterion B. The buildings in this district represent common examples of wood framing and are not likely to provide new information on this construction type that is not already available through other means; therefore it is not likely to be eligible under Criterion D.

U.S. 113 Wardway Historic District



streetscape with S-08579 in foreground, S-11467 in background, view to NE



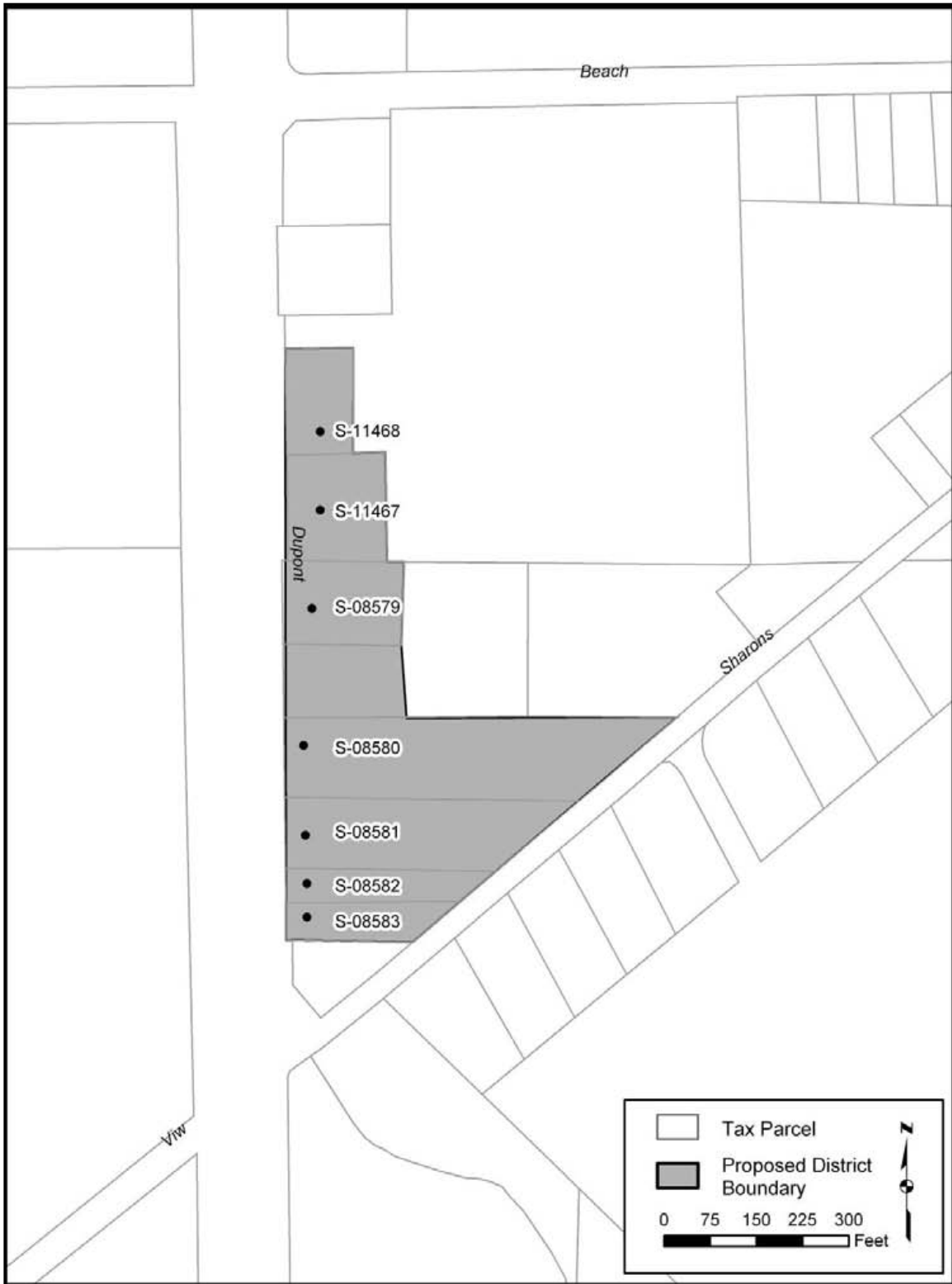
streetscape with S-08581 in foreground, S-08580 in background, view to NE



streetscape with S-08582 in foreground, S-08583 in background, view to SE



streetscape with S-08582 in foreground and S-08581 and S-8580 in background, view to NE



U.S. 113 Wardway Historic District, proposed boundary



(1937 aerial photograph)



(1954 aerial photograph)



(1961 aerial photograph)



(2002 aerial photograph)