

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Item number 7

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N-107

Property Name: S. Holton Farm, (1868); built mid-nineteenth century

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

The Holton Farm is located in cultivated farmland (including the entire 165 acre parcel of the mid-nineteenth century farmstead) on the east side of Rt. 435 approximately 2 miles northwest of Middletown. The house and outbuildings are set back about one-hundred yards from the road within a yard of dense ornamental plantings. The nominated parcel includes five acres containing all the outbuildings, the house, grounds, and the lane leading in from Rt. 435.

The nominated parcel begins at a point 250 feet south of the intersection of the present farmlane and Rt. 435 and extends in a line 1000 feet to the east at which point it turns 90° to the north and proceeds for a distance of 750 feet. From the northeast corner the line runs back to the east side of Rt. 435, turns 90° and joins the two points forming the western boundary.

The nominated parcel includes sufficient acreage to provide for the preservation of the house, outbuildings, grounds and immediate setting.

UTM 18.36640.69140 Tax parcel 13-017.00-093

Owner: Mary Crossland

P. O. Box 74

Middletown, Delaware

Description:

The farmhouse is a ca. 1850 three -story ell-shaped frame dwelling in the Greek Revival idiom and Georgian I-form. It has a five-bay symmetrical facade, central-hall plan, and a shallowly-pitched hipped roof with two square brick chimneys set in from each gable end. The two-story rear ell has a shallowly-pitched gable roof with a central brick chimney and corrugated iron sheathing. The structure has a 5" weatherboard exterior, painted white, with a wide plain board used as a frieze beneath the cornice and a central facade porch supported by four square and turned posts with scrolled cutwork supports. There are six-over-six sash windows on the first and second floors, and three-over-three shallow sash windows on the third floor. The central doorway is a simple interruption of Greek Revival style, with transom lights and side-lights atop wood-panel pilasters. The door is paneled wood. Windows and doors have plain wood lintels, sills, and surrounds. Trim is painted green.

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The house retains its integrity. The facade remains unaltered in its feeling and rhythm although shutters have been removed, and has the box-like feeling of the nationally popular Greek Revival style. The farm outbuildings, particularly the granary and two milk-houses, contribute to the integrity of the approximately five-acre site immediately surrounding the house as they indicate the changing but continual use of the farm since at least the early nineteenth century. The lane leading to the house appears to be in its original place, and contributes to the integrity of the complex by retaining the setback from Choptank Road.

The overall dimensions of the core structure are 39' by 18'4". The rear ell on the north side of the house measures 34' long by 14'2" wide, excluding the porch addition which runs the full length of the ell and is 7'2" wide.

The single-pile house is entered through a central passage, with a staircase leading up the south side of the hall and symmetrical floor plan is repeated on the two upper floors. The staircase features turned balusters and a curved mahogany rail, and terminates in an octagonal newel post. The first floor front rooms have matching fireplace mantels with cupid's-bow or Moorish arch openings. From the back of the house, the stairway can be seen to be illuminated by two windows; the fenestration is irregular, and may have been altered at one time.

Interior access to the ell is through the north room of the core, where a large open doorway leads to the inside room (now a dining room) of the ell. The ell is single-pile, two rooms long, and two stories high, and was built in two sections. The inside room is pierced by opposing doors and windows, which form the north side of the ell and suggest a one-third Georgian facade. Stairs lead from the northeast corner of this inside room to upper chambers. The inside room shares a hearth wall (although it has no fireplace opening) with the kitchen, which features a large stone hearth. There are built-in cupboards and winder stairs on the west wall of the kitchen, leading to upper chambers formerly occupied by hired help. The kitchen has doors set opposite each other on the north and south walls, with the south-side door providing access to the house from the porch. Fenestration is symmetrical from side to side. There is an original chair rail in the kitchen. A shed-roof enclosed porch has been built along the south side of the kitchen/dining room ell; access to the basement, originally an outside entrance, is through this porch.

The ell shows evidence of some remodeling during or after the construction of the core; it can be read as two adjoining units with a chimney centrally located between them. The kitchen, or outside part of the ell, is set on stone piers which have been filled-in with brick. The inside room has a full basement of brick, as does the northern room of the core. There is a brick staircase foundation and a crawl-space beneath the southern room of the core structure, which overall has a half-foundation. This structural system is fairly typical of mid nineteenth-century building in the area.

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There are several contributing outbuildings on the farm site, including a shed (formerly a chicken house), two milkhouses (one near the house, the other near the foundations of a cattle barn), a granary, and a small shed, as well as a gasoline pump. Of these, the granary and milkhouses are notable for their contribution to the integrity of the property, as they embody changing uses of the farm over time. The granary is a double-crib, drive-through, two-story timber-frame structure with a corrugated iron roof; it measures 32' long by 24'4" wide. The old milkhouse, formerly located near the well on what is now the enclosed south-side ell porch, was moved to the northeast corner of the house when a larger milkhouse was built closer to the cattle barn. The newer milk-and-pump-house survives with its cement watering trough and pump near the foundations of the cattle barn, torn down after the dairy herd was sold in the late 1930s. The foundations measure 32' x 32'. There are the remains of an apple orchard, three trees along the south side of the lane continuing towards woodlands at the eastern end of the property; the site of the orchard, which formerly had about 75 trees, is now a cultivated field. All of the outbuildings contribute to the integrity of the property surrounding and including the farmhouse and are included in the boundaries of the nomination, the approximately five acres surrounding the farmhouse and outbuildings, including the lane leading to the house from Choptank Road.

Historic Background and Significance:

The property was purchased in 1838 by Spencer Holton, from Andrew Eliason. Eliason had inherited some of the holdings of his father-in-law, William Cann, who owned ten different properties in Pencader and St. George's Hundreds. A description of the property, dated 1838, while Eliason still held it in trust for Cann's young son, Thomas, indicates three adjoining properties. Improvements on the land included "an old frame dwelling house", apple orchard, and outbuildings - a stable, log kitchen, and corncrib. Neighboring holdings contained several log buildings in various states of repair (see continuation sheet, item 8, page 6). An earlier record of these properties indicates a separate parcel from a fifty-acre tract of land by a private road (see continuation sheet, item 8, page 7). It is unclear exactly which portions of land Holton purchased from Eliason in 1838, but we know that he added to his acreage in 1850 with the purchase of adjoining lands from Adam Carson to bring his farm to its size of 164 acres. The farm has remained largely unchanged in size since that time and now totals about 165 acres.

In 1850, Holton was producing corn, wheat, oats, butter and potatoes as well as hay and clover seed. His livestock included milch cows, horses, other cattle, a couple of sheep, and some swine. The farm was valued at \$6,000, which was below the average valuation for other farms in St. George's Hundred in 1850. His total acreage of 165 acres was also below the average landholding of 184 acres, but Holton's land was 100 percent improved, or cultivated. Given the data provided by the 1850 agricultural census, it is apparent that Spencer Holton was neither the biggest nor the smallest farmer in the area. In all the enumerated categories, his farm came in just under the average, with the exception of the production of butter, potatoes, and seed clover, which exceed the mean. He had an average number of milch cows - possibly very productive ones, given the large amount of butter the farm produced, and more than the average number of swine. He slaughtered \$110 worth of animals that year, and either sold or used the meat.

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Although comparative figures are not yet available for subsequent years of the agricultural census, we can follow the fortunes of the Holton Farm through 1880. The value of the farm increased to \$8,500 in 1860, then leapt to \$16,500 in 1870, before dropping again (despite an increase in size to 191 acres) to \$10,000 by 1880. There was some diversification with the addition of market orchards sometime between 1860 and 1870; in 1870, the farm produced \$725 worth of orchard products. By 1880, 25 acres of peach trees had been planted, although they were not bearing that year; the single acre of apple trees, however, produced 50 bushels of marketable apples. By 1880, also, poultry, eggs, milk, and rye were listed among the farm's output. Thus the farm shows a measure of diversification, perhaps in response to falling conditions in the wheat market after the Civil War and a general decline in farm price levels during the 1870s.

The family that occupied the farmhouse during the period it achieved significance included Spencer Holton, his wife, and several children - various sources indicate that there were seven or eight Holton children. In 1860, Spencer Holton, as head of household, was enumerated as farmer, while his older sons, Samuel, Randolph (or Jesse) and Andrew were listed as farm laborers. In addition to the family, the household included six black servants, farm laborers, and children. By 1870, the oldest surviving Holton son, Randolph (Samuel died in 1869) had taken over the farm after Spencer Holton's death in early 1870. Spencer Holton's was inventoried and valued at \$433.85 in March 1870, with the largest values in livestock and crops; from the list of household furnishings, we can see that the Holton family enjoyed amenities such as a coal stove, large areas which were carpeted, a clock and looking glass, all items in keeping with a middling amount of farm prosperity.

In 1870 the household had dwindled in family and increased in hired help. Randolph (or Jesse) paid out \$600 in wages that year, including the cost of board; there were five black servants and farm laborers living on the farm, some in the farmhouse and some in another dwelling on the farm. By 1880, the Holton family on the farmstead numbered only three, helped by three black farm hands and two domestic servants. Jesse Holton hired 100 weeks' worth of labor that year, paying \$250 in wages, while the value of the farm decreased somewhat.

By 1886, the Holton farm was being auctioned for the payment of debts. The highest bidder, who paid \$6,600 for the farm, was John Baily, executor of the estate of George Baily of Philadelphia, to whom a debt of \$6,000 had been owed. The auction price of the farm was a further drop from its 1880 valuation of \$10,000.

In 1893, the Holton farm was being worked by Thomas P. Riley, a farmer apparently hired by John Baily. Riley had been farming in east St. George's Hundred since at least 1860; in 1880 it was noted on the agricultural census that he "rents for share of products." The farms Riley had worked previously were similar to the Holton farm, producing wheat, corn, oats, potatoes, butter and hay and having a variety of livestock. In 1880, Riley's rented farm was diversifying in the same ways as the Holton farm, growing peaches and apples and producing poultry, eggs, and cattle for market.

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The farm went through a series of owners around the turn of the century. It was purchased by Howard and Mary Crossland, parents of the current owner, in 1928, and has been in the Crossland family since that time. Dairy, vegetable and grain farming have been the most recent uses. Howard Crossland was forced to sell his herd of prize Guernsey cattle in 1938 because of an ongoing battle with the county health department over his refusal to put cement floors in the cattle barn. He had been selling milk (with the lowest bacteria count of any milk in the area) to Middletown until that time.

The farm is currently in corn and wheat, and retains much the same acreage as it did when Spencer Holton consolidated the land in 1850. According to the present owner, George Crossland, "field-swapping" was common practice among the neighboring farmers as a matter of convenience; this did not affect the size of individual farms, however.

Throughout the period of its agricultural use, the site has contained buildings - the farm dwelling and several outbuildings - that are significant both in their own right and in relation to the farm enterprise as a whole. The house that Spencer Holton built in the mid-nineteenth century, adding to or replacing another building on the site, was emblematic of rising agricultural fortunes in the area. Holton chose to build in a style that proclaimed both respectability and good taste. The main part of the house is a frame-built example of the Greek Revival style, which was used in buildings of every sort across the nation during the mid-nineteenth century. Holton's farmhouse is a relatively simple version, but it features-and, more importantly, has retained - the classic features of the Greek Revival.

Although simple in detail and degree of embellishment, the core structure embodies the essence of the Greek Revival: classical symmetry and proportion. These attributes are also evident in the symmetrical fenestration on all three visible sides of the core, and in the central positioning of a facade porch whose roof is supported by four evenly-placed turned posts decorated with scrolled cutwork brackets.

With increasing agricultural prosperity in the nineteenth century, a fashionable house was a matter of pride in achievement for the farmer. The Holton farmhouse embodies this achievement and pride: it is a building in the local vocabulary that uses the national style of its time to proclaim democratic values and middle-class respectability. The Greek Revival symmetry and Georgian-idiom plan, stylistic details, and overall integrity of the structure are all emblematic of the progress of farmers and the achievement of wealth in nineteenth-century rural Delaware.

The farmhouse, with its related outbuildings, is significant on a local level as being one of many examples of rebuilding in the area. As Holton's prosperity increased, he was able to build a finer dwelling on his farm; he was able to diversify agriculturally as well. Thus the boundaries of the nomination include not only the house, but also the outbuildings - all of which are contributing factors-, the area of plantings surrounding the house and yard, and the approach to the house including the lane leading in from Choptank Road, a total of about 5 acres. The integral nature of the complex and the close ties of the house to its agricultural context justify these boundaries.

Nomination by Anne Witty