

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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K-1366:

Property Name: William Stevens House

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

The William Stevens House is located on the south of Route 6, about 1/2 mile west of Road 138. Originally part of a 158-acre farm, the house and some land was split off from the farm in 1975. Because of this, the nominated property includes just the 2.927 acres that the house occupies. Tax Map No. 17-2-25; Deed Book O-34, p. 131.

Owner: Vanguard Corporation
c/o William E. Brown
R. D 1, Box 626
Clayton, DE 19938

Description:

The William Stevens House was built about 1860 as a radical departure from much of the existing housing stock in the area. Located on the Smyrna-Millington Road, it is a 5-bay, 3-story, single-pile, Italianate dwelling, commonly known as a "peach mansion." This form was built in the prosperous farmlands of New Castle County during the mid-nineteenth century, but it is not commonly found in Kent County. The name derives from the housing types associated with the boom in peach cultivation in Delaware.

The central entrance door on the facade is a double door with a clear-glass transom and sidelights. The windows on the first floor and on the second floor are six-over-six, while those on the third floor are three-over-three. There is a 3-bay central porch on the facade with a box cornice and chamfered square posts. The roof is a low-hipped, standing-seam, metal roof with interior end chimneys and a projecting box cornice with decorative brackets. The corner boards are narrow and undecorated. The whole of the main block sits on a brick foundation with a full basement.

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On the rear of the house is a gable-roofed, 3-bay, 2-story wing that was actually the main house until the main block was erected. The wing dates to the period of Abel Jones' ownership, after 1811. Most of the rear wing is sided in weatherboard, but portions of it still retain the original clapboard siding. Three shed-roofed additions have been added to the rear wing. Directly in front of the house is a long row of evergreen trees, dating to the mid-nineteenth century. These trees once lined a lane which ended in a circle in front of the house. There are three frame outbuildings to the rear of the house. The garage and small barn were built in the twentieth century. The springhouse dates from the nineteenth century.

Historical Background:

The house was built about 1860 by William Stevens, who had acquired the original 230-acre farm in 1858 from James H. Jones. At the time of the sale, Jones was living in Chester, Randolph County, Illinois. Jones' father, Abel, had bought the property in 1811 from Elizabeth Jones. There is no documentary evidence to indicate that Abel and Elizabeth were related. Elizabeth was a widow, who lived on the Sassafras River in Maryland.

The farm was in an excellent location, being located on the Smyrna-Millington Road. This road was and is a major east-west road that crossed through an important agricultural region and gave it access to both the Delaware and the Chesapeake Bay areas. The 1870 agricultural census lists the farm as being worth \$16,000. The principal crop grown was Indian corn, with wheat a distant second. A large amount of butter was produced and sold as a third cash crop. Fruit tree cultivation was non-existent. This is the same pattern of agriculture followed by the vast majority of farms in the area. Peach cultivation would not become important for another few years.

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Statement of Significance:

The William Stevens House is an architectural expression of the great agricultural prosperity that Kenton Hundred experienced in the mid-decades of the nineteenth century. The use of the massive Italianate building was a radical departure in building choices for Kenton Hundred. This style is commonly associated with New Castle County. The attention that was paid in this house to style indicates that Stevens saw his new home as an extension of self and wished to create a most favorable impression. The landscaping, the use of the circular drive, and the double line of trees all contributed to the proper effect of a prosperous landowner. As an example of the emerging mid-nineteenth century aesthetic of building construction, the William Stevens House is being nominated under Criterion C.