

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received JUL 10 1984  
date entered AUG 9 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic ~~The~~ Pharo House

and/or common The Pratt House

2. Location

street & number Odessa & Silver Lake Roads \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Middletown <sup>v.c.</sup> ~~vicinity of~~ ~~Congressional District~~

state Delaware code 10 county New Castle code 003

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name The Pratt Company - A Partnership

street & number 55 West Main Street

city, town Middletown \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state Delaware

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds, 4th Floor

street & number City/County Building, 800 French St.

city, town Wilmington \_\_\_\_\_ state Delaware

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Delaware Cultural Resource Survey N-5934 has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local \_\_\_\_\_

depository for survey records Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

city, town Dover \_\_\_\_\_ state Delaware

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The buildings are numbered to correspond with the accompanying diagram.

The Pharo House (1) is a two and a half story frame farmhouse at the southeast intersection of Delaware routes 299 and 442. The original house, which is the main part of the structure, is an ell-shape with the leg of the ell extending back from the southwest corner of the main block. At the rear of the house there is a large one story rectangular addition with the long end parallel to the main road. This addition has a flat roof and extends beyond both sides of the rear ell to which it is attached. This addition of the late 1940's was made to accommodate part of the hatchery operation which was the owner's business.

Both ells of the main house have steep gable roofs with the ridges running parallel to the long sides. Both ends of the main roof are of the jerkinhead type as is the roof on the facade cross gable. Even the three dormers which project from the main roof have diminutive jerkinhead roofs. A lacy wood trim in a leaf motif edges the entire roof line, and pendants accentuate each corner. Barge boards and brackets trim the dormer windows. A one story porch enclosed with screen and lattice extends along the east side of the rear ell. Wooden clapboards cover the entire exterior. A single brick chimney projects through the roof ridge near the center of the main block. There were originally two chimneys in each ell.

A one story porch with an almost flat shed roof crosses the entire five bay facade. Although its original floor is gone, the porch is otherwise intact. Four pairs of square columns on pedestals support the porch roof with an extra column added at the outside corners. Between each pair of columns are two elliptical arches; each set of arches meets in a drop where they are not supported by columns. The main entrance to the house is in the central bay and is a six panelled door with rectangular transom and sidelights. This is not the original door although the original still exists in one of the outbuildings.

Two four-window bays project from the main block, one at the west side and one on the south end of the east

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1880s **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Pharo House is an example of a late 19th century Delaware farm house which retains nearly all of its original interior and exterior elements. Prosperous farmers have lived in the house through decades of agricultural development and change. The house is significant as an architectural entity which embodies the characteristics of a popular 1880's style and construction method. It is in excellent condition. (Criterion C).

The Pharo House was built about the time Martha Black Merritt Pharo purchased the property in 1881. Pomeroy and Beer's New Topographical Atlas of the State of Delaware, published in 1868 shows no house on this property. The Baist Atlas of 1893 shows the house in its present location.

The exterior of the Pharo House has many architectural elements which could have been taken from the mid to late 19th century pattern books of A.J. Downing, H.H. Holly, and others. Although Downing published his first book on domestic architecture in 1841, his influence on popular architectural taste was long-lasting. Downing's publication was the nation's first house pattern book, and it was directed toward the middle class or what he considered to be the ordinary man. Downing published a number of books with hundreds of house patterns. The Pharo house is an example of the influence Downing wielded long after his death. Although other books of house plans appeared in the second half of the 19th century, many of them, such as H. H. Holly's Country Seats essentially echoed Downing's ideas. The Pharo House exhibits Downing's preferences for the country house or farm: Gothic elements, verandah, bay window, barge boards, and nature's motifs in the trim. Although its present color, white with dark green trim, is in the Greek Revival fashion which Downing disliked, it is not difficult to imagine it in his preferred faun or cream colors.

The interior of the Pharo House, however, is of an

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

New Castle County Registry of Deeds, New Castle County Registry of Wills  
 Peninsula Directory 1891-2; Census, 1880; Three Centuries of Delaware  
 Agriculture, Passmore, Maske, Harris, Pub. by Delaware State Grange, 1978; Farm  
 Journal & Business Directory, New Castle Co., 1914; Biographical & Geneological  
 History of the State of Delaware, J.M. Runk & Co., 1899

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 10.54

Quadrangle name Middletown

Quadrangle scale 1:2400

### UMT References

A 

1	8
4	4
0	2
3	0

4	3
6	6
5	4
0	0

B 

1	8
4	4
0	0
9	0

4	3
6	6
4	9
0	0

C 

1	8
4	4
0	0
4	0

4	3
6	6
6	9
0	0

D 

1	8
4	4
0	0
9	0

4	3
6	6
6	9
0	0

E 



F 



G 



H 



### Verbal boundary description and justification

As shown on New Castle County Property Map #13-22, this is parcel 17, is 10.54 acres bounded on the north by the Middletown-Odessa Road (route 299) and on the west by Silver Lake Road, the south boundary is parallel to route 299, the east boundary is a diagonal line from route 299 to the south boundary.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Priscilla M. Thompson

organization The History Store

date February 14, 1984

street & number 418 N. Union St.

telephone (301) 654-1727

city or town Wilmington

state Delaware

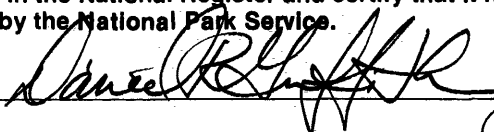
## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national     state     local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title

date June 29, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 8/9/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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side. The bays contain one over one double hung sash windows except for one opening in the rear bay which is a door. The other windows in the house are double hung two over two sash, with full length windows on the first floor and shorter windows on the upper floors. Exterior panelled shutters frame the first floor windows and there are louvered blinds on the second floor.

The grounds and outbuildings are appropriate to the farm or country dwelling which this house has always been. There is a large yard with mature trees, boxwood, and other shrubbery. Most of the ten-acre plot is a flat field extending to the south of the house.

The interior of the main house is the central hall plan more common to earlier styles than to the wooden version of the Gothic farmhouse with its balloon frame. The main staircase is immediately in front of the door when one enters the central hall. To the left is a double parlor which occupies the entire half of the main block. This room, the ballroom, has its original plaster medallion in the center of the ceiling as well as a plaster cornice. On the other side of the hall are two rooms, probably the original parlor and dining room, with pocket doors between them. The original plaster medallions remain in the parlor and entrance hall. The kitchen and additional stairs to the second floor are behind the dining room. While the house interior is not as elaborate as that of a town house, the mouldings, plaster work, and such hardware as porcelain escutcheon covers add a touch of elegance.

The front section of the second floor contains the main sleeping rooms. In the rear of the house and on the third floor are smaller sleeping rooms which probably at one time accommodated servants or farm workers. The third floor rooms are smaller because they are under the roof gables, and the rear third floor contains a cistern for storage of water.

The original basement was remodelled to contain much of the hatchery operation of the 1950's. Although the original foundation structure is no longer visible from the interior, the basement was the site of a significant part of the hatchery operation. C.

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The outbuildings include some original structures as well as newer ones which were a part of the hatchery operation in the Post World War II era.

The Granary or Barn (2) is a 1 1/2 story rectangular building with gable roof and stone foundation. The gable end, facing the Odessa-Middletown Road, has a vehicle entrance on the first floor and a loading door above. The original doors from the main house are now in this upper loading opening. There is a one-story shed-roofed addition on the east side. Most of the siding is now tin which replaced the original wood siding in about 1940.

The Granary probably dates from the 1880s as does the main house. Although it now has a concrete floor, most of the interior wooden post and beam construction remains. It appears that the building was constructed by the old method of laying out beams and rafters, because these structural elements are numbered for assembly. The ends of original grain chutes are also visible where they project through the first floor ceiling. The grain was stored in the loft and then sent down through chutes to the first floor. C

The Battery House (3) is a rectangular one story stucco building with gable roof and a generator house at the rear. This building dates from about 1941 and contained the chick battery, a device for raising baby chicks. The delicate baby chicks required the proper heat, water, ventilation, and feed. The generator at the rear was used only when the regular power supply failed. NC

The Pump Shed (4) was once a small chicken house which stood on a different site. It now houses the water pump. NC

The Big Chicken House or Breeder House (5) is about 300 feet long, has a tin shed roof, is two stories high, has redwood siding, and was built in three sections. Here the adult chickens which produced eggs for the hatchery were kept. It was built in three sections, the central part being the earliest dating from 1939-40. The east section, excluding the tower, was built in 1950. The tower which

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projects above the roof is actually the first bulk feed storage bin built on the Delmarva Peninsula. The Pratts constructed this in 1951. It permitted bulk storage of feed which went directly to the chicken house below. This innovation was a move toward the automation which would eventually put individual hatcheries such as this one out of business. The West section of the chicken house was built in 1958. NC

Incinerator (6) NC

Range Shelter (7) Originally constructed as a shed-roofed open shelter in about 1950, it has been enclosed. When the Pratts operated the hatchery chickens were loose on the "range", hence the need for a range shelter. NC

Growing Pen (8) The Pratts purchased this pre-fabricated building during World War II. It originally stood where the west end of the Big Chicken House is today. This is where chicken destined for breeding purposes grew to maturity. NC

Small Chicken House (9) This small building with a shed roof was originally a chicken house which stood near the back of the main house. Today it is used as a garage. NC

Farm Employee's House (10) This small one story house with gable roof originally stood about 100 yards away from its present site. NC

The buildings noted as Non-Contributing should be evaluated again when they have reached sufficient age to be considered for the National Register.

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earlier style. It is in fact, very similar in both arrangement and trim to the interior of at least one of the well-known Cochran Mansions in Middletown. The Pharo House has a center hall plan with a very large room, sometimes called the ballroom, on one side and two smaller rooms on the other. The interior trim includes plaster medallions, plaster cornices, porcelain escutcheon covers, and other details which are also similar to interior elements in the Cochran houses. The outside of the Pharo House exemplifies popular taste of the late 19th century making the house suitable to a fairly important farmer and land holder. On the inside, however, it said that the Cochrans of Middletown, Delaware had taste worthy of emulation.

Although the deed record shows that Martha Black Merritt Pharo purchased the property in 1881, the 1880 census for West St. George's Hundred listed the Pharo family. Horatio Pharo, Martha's husband, was a forty year old farmer. Martha, the "Lady of the House", was 30. The Pharos had two children, Horatio, Jr. age 8 and Sara age 12. The family also had a ten year old boy as a servant.

The Pharo House is just outside the town of Middletown, which was a 19th century agricultural center, Appoquinimink Creek flows from Middletown to the Delaware Bay and was once sufficiently navigable to permit shipment of agricultural products. In 1856 the Delaware Railroad started operating through Middletown providing a faster means of transportation for produce. Through the centuries the produce of the Middletown area has included grains, fruits, and poultry.

Nearby Noxontown and Noxontown Pond took their name from the Noxon Family, the 18th century proprietors of 3000 acres of land near Appoquinimink Creek. The Noxon family lived in a brick mansion and owned slaves who cultivated their lands. When Benjamin Noxon died in the 19th century he owned 560 acres of the original family tract. He left it to his three daughters: Mary Paxon Noxon, Elizabeth B.Noxon, and Sara Noxon. A portion of this land eventually became the site of the Pharo House.



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Mary Noxon married Thomas S. Merritt, and they had a daughter, Elizabeth. After Mary's death Thomas S. Merritt married Mary's sister, Sara Noxon. Thomas and Sara also had children; this makes the chain of title on the property somewhat confusing. Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas and his first wife, sold her interest in the property to her father and his second wife (who was also Elizabeth's aunt and step-mother) in 1845. Sara Noxon Merritt died before her husband, so he came into ownership of the property.

Martha Black Merritt Pharo was the daughter of Thomas S. Merritt and Sara Noxon Merritt. Although the record is somewhat difficult to follow, Martha was mentioned in her father's will and as per Deed Record W-11, page 458, on February 23, 1881, the property was transferred to her by Merritt N. Willets and his wife. Merritt N. Willets was the grandson of Thomas S. Merritt by his first wife making him a cousin of sorts to Martha Black Pharo. Therefore, although the deed records indicate changes of names, the property was transferred among people who were closely related.

Horatio Pharo, Martha's husband, was born in Pennsylvania, as were both of his children. This indicates that the Pharos were married and had children before they moved to Middletown. In 1882 Middletown had a population of 2,000, and the town's directory, in which Horatio Pharo was listed as a farmer, described it as a manufacturing and commercial town. Land was worth \$25 to \$100 per acre and its manufactures included carriages, peach baskets, and agricultural implements. What the Directory did not mention was that Middletown had already seen the rise and decline of the peach industry.

The peach became an important crop in Delaware in the 1830's, and its cultivation gradually moved southward through the state. The peach was followed by the yellows, a disease which devastated the Middletown peach industry in the late 1870s. Some Middletown houses such as those owned by the Cochran family west of Middletown are often referred to as "Peach Mansions", but the Pharo House was not a product of peach prosperity.

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Local tradition says that Horatio Pharo was a grain merchant, and other records seem to verify this. Various directories from 1882 to 1914 listed him as a farmer in Middletown and stated that he owned 180 acres. However, the property was actually in Horatio's wife's name until her death in 1919 when he became the owner. When he died two years later the estate inventory listed his personal goods at a value of \$5600 and his real estate at \$17,000, the value of his 180 acre farm on the road from Middletown to Odessa.

The inventory of his personal assets was brief:

Wheat in ground \$ 450.  
Corn in crib \$ 200.  
Money in bank \$ 210.  
Money in Savings Bank \$ 99.73  
Stock \$ 500.  
Household goods \$ 355.  
Horse and wagons \$ 215.

Horatio and Martha Pharo's son, Horatio Jr., who was unmarried, lived at home with his parents, and worked on the farm. He and his sister inherited the farm after his father's death. The sister, who lived in Haddonfield, N.J. apparently did not wish to have the property, and she signed it over to her brother. Two years later, in 1923, Horatio Pharo, Jr. sold the property, now reduced to 160 acres, to Emily J. Roberts for \$ 18,650. For the first time in about 200 years the farmland went out of the ownership of descendants of the Noxon family.

When Emily Roberts died in 1937 her two sons inherited the property. They sold it within a year to James A. Finley. In 1940 Finley sold it to Franklin and Mattie Pratt and the property has now been in the Pratt family for more than 40 years. Frank Pratt and his wife Mattie Holt Pratt soon sold the Pharo House to their son, Henry Holt Pratt, who operated Pratt's Hatchery with his wife.

The Pratts opened their hatchery in 1940 in the basement of the house. They later expanded into the addition which is now at the back of the house. The hatchery required additional outbuildings as well as incubators and other

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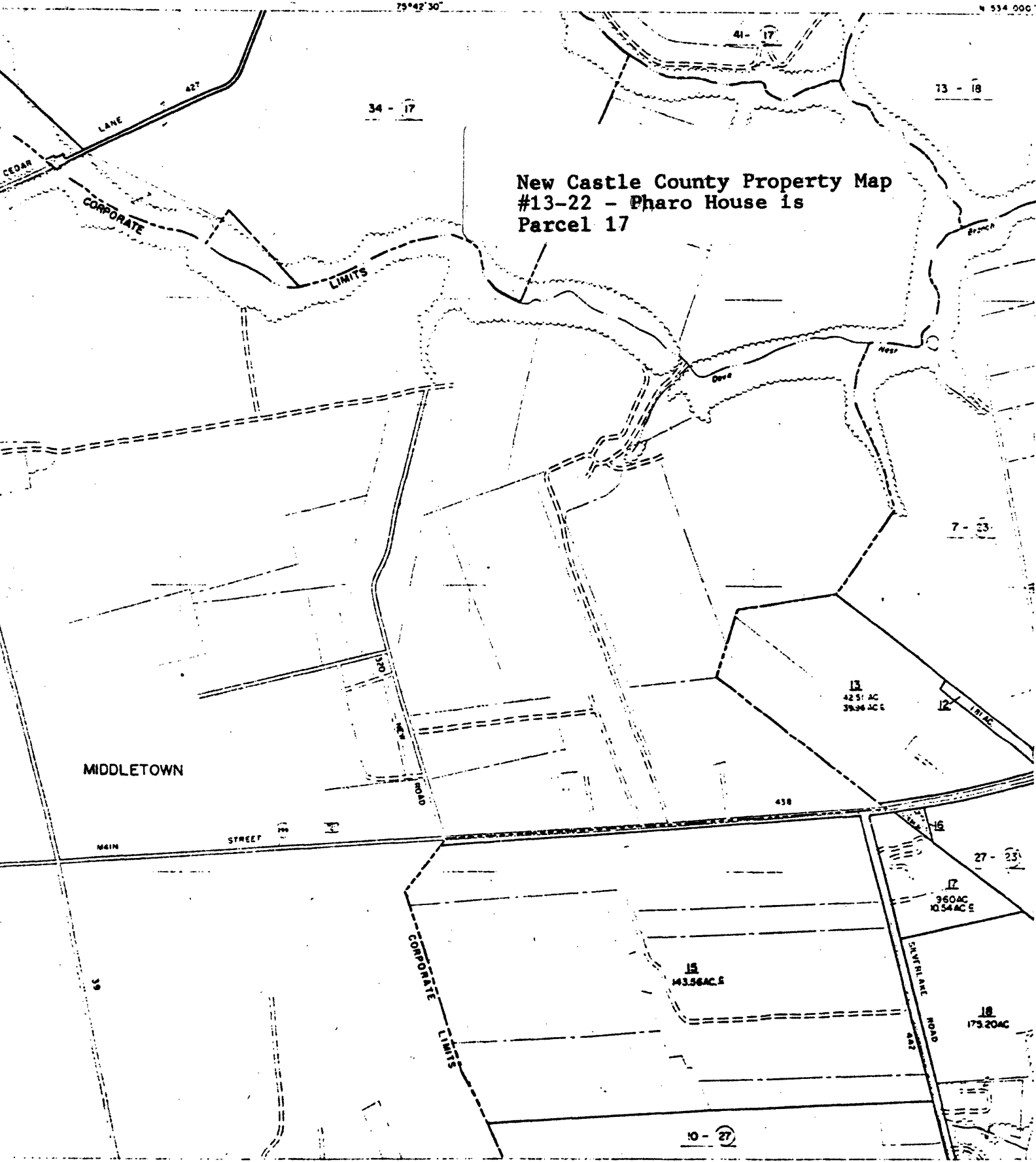
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equipment. Eugene and Norman Pratt who now own the Pharo House worked in the family business and have a collection of photographs which document the hatchery operation. Today Delaware's chickens are produced by large operations which handle all aspects of poultry production from hatching to marketing. It was the development of these large operations which caused the demise of smaller producers. The Pratt Hatchery closed in 1972, probably the last of its type in Delaware.

It is unlikely that the Pharo House will ever again be the center for the type of agricultural operations which surrounded it in the past century. Fortunately, its excellent condition preserves a reminder of the changing patterns of farm life and of the agricultural continuity of the past. The architectural style of the Pharo House is an almost unchanged example of a popular type of large 19th century Delaware farm dwelling which followed the popular taste on the exterior and used many interior elements which had been popular with the local gentry several decades earlier.

75°42'30"

N 534 000



New Castle County Property Map  
 #13-22 - Pharo House is  
 Parcel 17

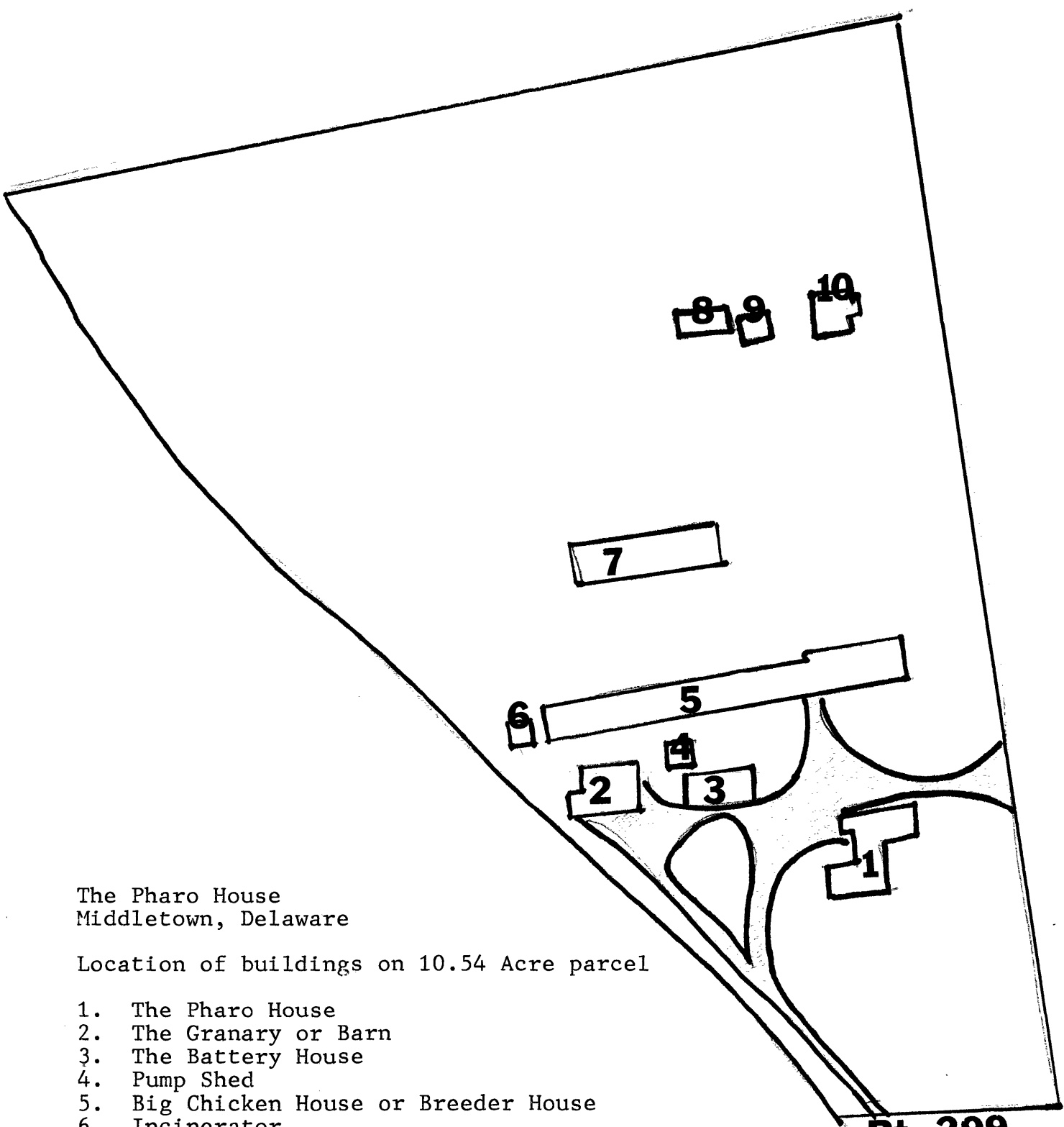
- CEMETERY
- CHURCH
- SCHOOL
- WOODED AREA
- FENCE
- MARSH
- BENCH MARK
- BLOCK/SECTION

- PARCEL OUTLINE
- INTERIOR PARCEL LINE
- PARCEL HOOK
- PARCEL NUMBER
- 120 AC TOTAL ASSESSED ACREAGE
- 125 AC TOTAL CALCULATED ACREAGE
- SP-40 PARCEL & CONTROL MAP NO
- 30 SUBDIVISION LOT NO



REVISIONS		
1	5-22-76	11
2	7-21-76	12
3	8-17-77	13
4	11-23-77	14
5	3-15-79	15
6	8-6-79	
7	8-24-79	
8	12-7-79	
9		
10		

PROPERTY MAP  
 NEW CASTLE COUNTY, DELAWARE  
 HUNDRED ST. GEORGES MAP NO  
 SCALE 1" = 400'  
 DATE OF FLYING 68-69  
 DATE COMPILED MAR 70  
 GRID SYSTEM DELAWARE STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM

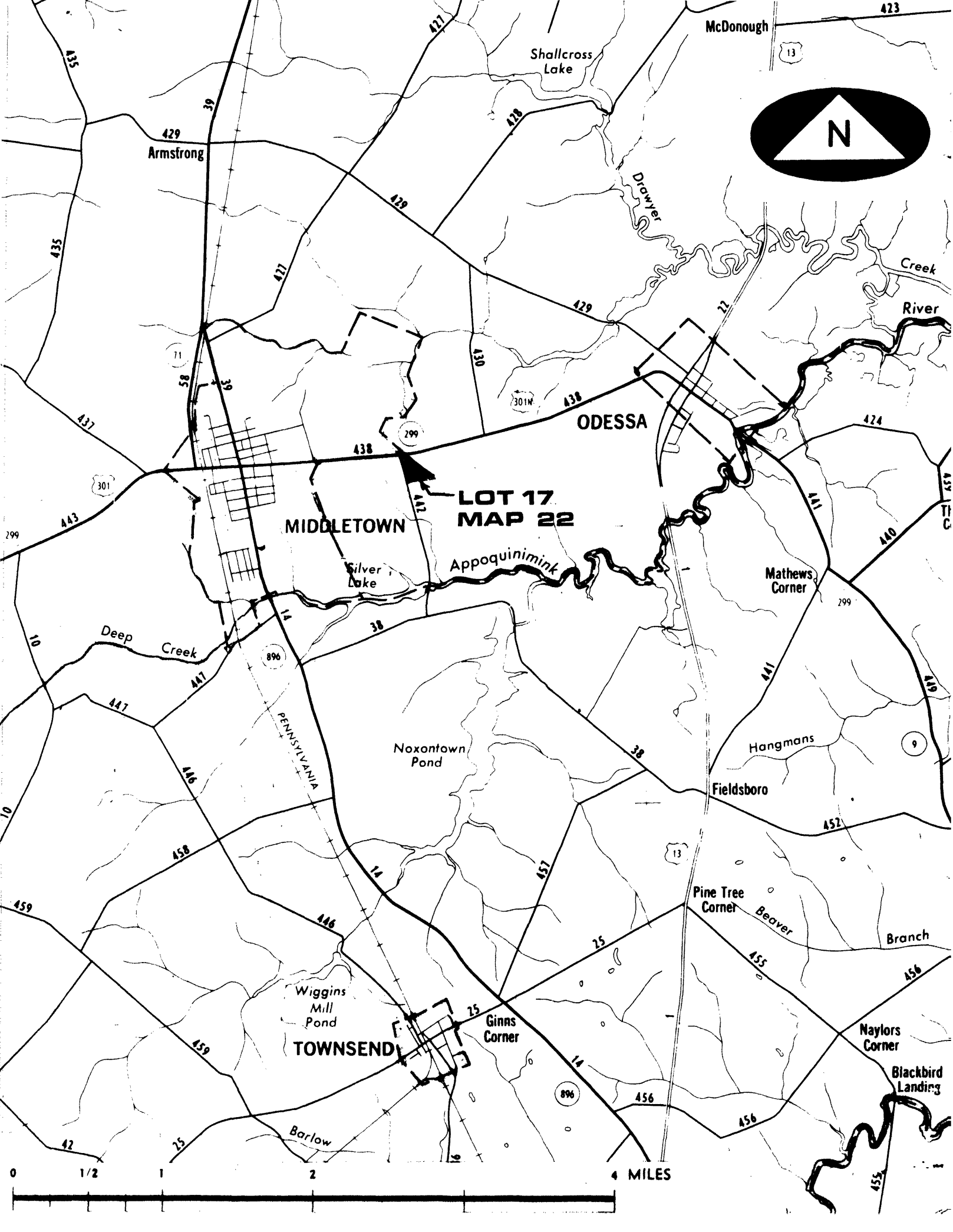


**Rt. 299**

The Pharo House  
 Middletown, Delaware

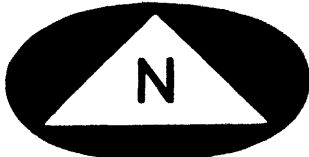
Location of buildings on 10.54 Acre parcel

- 1. The Pharo House
- 2. The Granary or Barn
- 3. The Battery House
- 4. Pump Shed
- 5. Big Chicken House or Breeder House
- 6. Incinerator
- 7. Range Shelter
- 8. Growing Pen
- 9. Small Chicken House
- 10. Farm Employee's House



McDonough

13



Shallcross Lake

Drawyer

Creek  
River

429  
Armstrong

ODESSA

MIDDLETOWN

**LOT 17  
MAP 22**

Silver Lake

Appoquinimink

Mathews Corner

Deep Creek

Noxontown Pond

Hangmans

Fieldsboro

PENNSYLVANIA

Pine Tree Corner

Beaver

Branch

Wiggins Mill Pond

TOWNSEND

Ginns Corner

Naylors Corner

Blackbird Landing

Barlow

4 MILES

