

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Ralph Potato House

other names/site number CRS#-6800

2. Location

street & number Road 493, Box 324

NA not for publication

city, town Laurel

vicinity

state Delaware

code DE

county Sussex

code 005

zip code 19956

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

N/A buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

1

NA Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Sweet Potato Houses of Sussex County, Delaware

Number of contributing resources previously

listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs

State or Federal agency and bureau

- SHPO

Date

9/25/90

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

NA

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Andrew Byers

11/15/90

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture/processing, storage

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture/storage

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)Other: Potato House

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls wood shingle & circular sawn board

roof asphalt (wood shingle in situ)

other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Ralph Potato House is a one and one half story, gable fronted, balloon frame structure built circa 1915 of dimension cut lumber. It is located southwest of Portsville, Delaware .3 miles southeast of the intersection of Roads 493 and 494 lying on the west side of Road 493. It belongs to a farm complex which is not being considered for nomination. The surrounding environment consists of cultivated (Indian corn) fields and uncultivated meadows and woodlands. Outbuildings including a granary and stable lie in close proximity to the potato house. During the heyday of the sweet potato the Ralph Farm grew Indian corn and produce vegetables such as peas, cucumbers, and tomatoes. The potato house was in use until the early 1940s when black rot and intensive labor costs made sweet potato production unprofitable.

The building is insulated with double sheathing having exterior wood shingles and interior planking and is oriented on a gable-to-gable end axis. An off-center double door, capped by a large second/attic story loading window and a small slated window in the gable comprise the front fenestration, while one large second story loading window and small slated gable window comprises the rear gable fenestration. Loading windows and entrance are carefully covered by hinged doors. The fenestration is original. The roof is modern asphalt shingles over original wood shingles. The general condition of the building is excellent. The whole rests upon a brick foundation.

The interior has been stripped of its storage bins and is now a storage building. However, the side walls on the ground floor show the clear demarcation of where its tall, narrow bins once stood. A discoloration of the walls indicate placement of bin end posts. With the evidence described above it may be deduced that the Ralph Potato House originally had a center aisle flanked by five bins on the right and four bins on the left sides.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Agriculture
Architecture

Period of Significance

1915-1937

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Ralph Potato House is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places as an excellent example of an architectural reflection of a broad historical trend and as a significant architectural type. The potato house, as a functional type, relates to the Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan's study unit III under the 1880-1940 period and is an example of that plan's property type 1B reflecting major economic and cultural trends relating to agriculture.

The broad historical pattern to which the potato house is directly linked is the modernization of agricultural practices in southern Delaware during the first half of the twentieth century including the emergence of truck farming, the growth of perishable produce crops, and the development of modern agricultural marketing.

The growth of sweet potato cultivation in southern Delaware was one of the major manifestations of the changes in production practices and crop choice. The potato house is the remaining physical evidence of this important trend in Sussex County's agricultural history when the sweet potato was "king".

Sweet potato cultivation dominated the region particularly in the years between 1910-1940 and was one of the first crops to benefit from truck farming and modern agricultural marketing. The long (eight month) and multi-phased process of sweet potato production impacted the culture and economy of the rural community in Sussex County during the years of its prominence as one of the area's cash crops.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Delaware Agricultural Statistics, Historical Series 1866-1974, Bul. no. 419,
Newark: University of Delaware, Agricultural Experiment Station, 1976.

Hancock, Harold B. The History of Sussex County, Sussex County Bicentennial
Committee, 1976.

Herman, Bernard and Siders, Rebecca. The Delaware Comprehensive Historic Preservation
Plan, prepared for the Delaware State Office of Archaeology and Historic
Preservation, 1987.

Oral History Interviews with retired sweet potato farmers of Sussex County, August 1986.
Tapes with the Center for Historic Architecture & Engineering, University of Delaware.

Scharf, Thomas. History of Delaware, 1609-1888, Philadelphia: L.J. Richards & Co., 1888.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings
- Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering
- Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .046 (967.3 square feet)

UTM References

A 1, 8 | 4, 4, 4, 3, 4, 2 | 4, 2, 6, 5, 4, 4, 1
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____ | _____ | _____

B _____ | _____ | _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____ | _____ | _____

See continuation sheet

Tax Parcel Map #: 4-32-10, 5

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the site is a rectangle surrounding potato house and adjoining lean-to addition and extending ten feet from respective roof lines on each side of that rectangle.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary is justifiable because this nomination asks for the consideration of only the potato house. The property and additional structures associated with the site are not included in this nomination. Lean-to addition is included within the boundary description only because it is inseparable from the potato house.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Judith Quinn

organization Center for Historic Architecture & Engineering date December 23, 1987

street & number Urban Affairs, University of Delaware telephone 302-451-2394

city or town Newark state Delaware zip code 19716

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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The interior, brick chimney still stands at the rear end of the house. The ladder stairs accessing the second story remain inside the main entrance.

As with most potato houses the construction is solid, the plan simple, and the elevations plain. The manipulation of air circultaion necessary during the months of curing and storing (November-February) is evident in shuttered openings, double sheathing, and gaps between walls and floorboards.

A corrogated aluminum and cedar post cart shed now adjoins the potato house on the north side. It does not however, mar or interfere with the structural integrity of the potato house.

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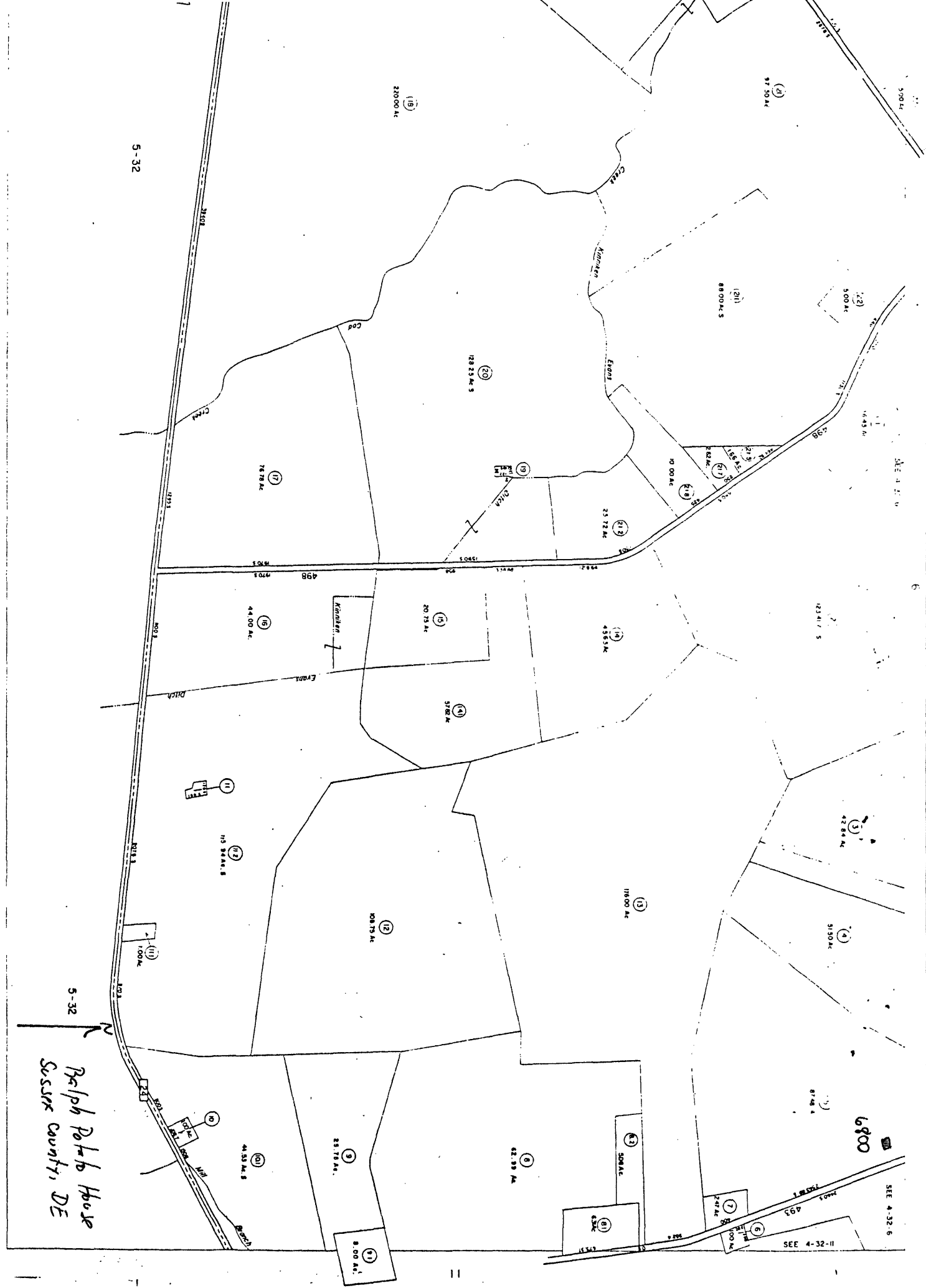
The potato house is significant as an architectural type. It was essential to the process of sweet potato production in both curing and storage capacities and was developed as a distinct building type to provide the functional needs required for a successful, saleable sweet potato crop. Potato houses share common construction elements and are recognizable on the landscape as belonging to this specific property type.

In form and materials the Ralph Potato House is a significant example of architectural responses to agricultural patterns. The building remains virtually unchanged, retaining not only very evident characteristics of potato house construction; chimney, ventilation features, minimal fenestration, and tightly fitting door hatches but clear markings of potato bin placement as well. The ghosts of bin placement are a rare element and combined with the building's excellent structural condition and function related details makes the Ralph Potato House a highly significant example of the property type. The Ralph Potato House has integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and association.

SUSSEX COUNTY
 DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

LEGEND

	County, Tax Parcel Number
	Water
	Road
	Ditch
	Building



Ralph Polko House
 Sussex County, DE