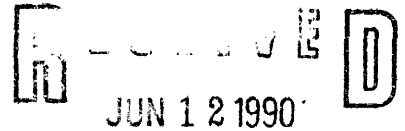


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

**NATIONAL
REGISTER**

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name: THE THOMAS B. COURSEY HOUSE

other name/site number: K-2783

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number: RD 1, Box 143, County Road 388

not for publication: NA

city/town: South Murderkill Hundred, Felton

vicinity: X

state: DE county: Kent

code: 001 zip code: 19943

=====

3. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

=====
4. State/Federal Agency Certification
=====

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Daniel M. [Signature] SHPO May 25, 1990
Signature of certifying official Date

Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

INA
Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

=====
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): _____

Patrick Andrews 7/23/90

Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic: Domestic - Single dwelling Sub: _____

Current : Domestic - Single dwelling Sub: _____

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification:

Italianate

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation brick roof asphalt
walls weatherboard other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: B & C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : NA

Areas of Significance: Architecture
Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1867 to 1899

Significant Dates : 1867 _____

Significant Person(s): Thomas B. Coursey

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: ~~xxxxxx~~ N/A Unknown

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

X See continuation sheet.

=====

9. Major Bibliographical References

=====

See Continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

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: 5.5 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>18</u>	<u>455690</u>	<u>4315680</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

 See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

The nominated property is shown as the solid line within parcel 46 on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The nominated acreage encompasses the area upon which the Coursey House and its related outbuildings now rest.

=====

11. Form Prepared By

=====

Name/Title: Donald A. Duhadaway, Jr., Historian; Kimberly R. Sebold, Research Assistant

Organization: Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation Date: August 30, 1989

Street & Number: 15 The Green Telephone: 1-302-736-5685

City or Town: Dover State: DE ZIP: 19901

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 1
=====

The Thomas B. Coursey House is located on County Road 388, the Milford-Canterbury Road, two miles southwest of Frederica and four miles southeast of Felton in South Murderkill Hundred. The house sits on a large grassy knoll overlooking the millpond where Coursey operated his principal grist mill during the nineteenth century. The property is bounded on the north and east by cultivated fields, on the south by a State of Delaware fishing area which itself previously was the site of the Coursey Mill, and on the west by County Road 388. The house is located on a wide expanse of lawn several hundred feet from the road and is surrounded by nineteenth-century trees on the north, south, and east sides. The property also contains a barn, machine shed, and a granary that were constructed in the early twentieth century.

The Coursey House, constructed in 1867, is a well-preserved example of the substantial rural country houses typically built in the mid-nineteenth century by men, like Coursey himself, who were members of the financial elite of the countryside. Displaying marked Italianate influences in terms of form, the house is a three-story, five bay, low hip-roofed, center-hall passage, single-pile, rectangular plan, large frame house. To the south there is an original two-story, shed-roofed wing; to the east there is a recently added one-story, shed-roofed wing which houses part of the modern kitchen, the laundry room, and a downstairs bath. Across part of the main facade is a Gothic-detailed hip-roofed porch with a moulded cornice, drop pendants, and elaborate jigsaw brackets, supports, and balustrade.

At the roof-line there is a moulded box cornice, below which there are original, small-scale, shallow-coved Italianate brackets. Interior brick chimneys rise from the north and south endwall of the main block, as well as from the South wing. The windows on all three floors have two-over-two double-hung sash, and moulded surrounds. First floor windows have moulded-panelled shutters, while those on the upper floors have louvered shutters. The front door is a multi-light, wood-panelled door with a moulded surround and a recessed transom. The house is sided with weatherboard and rests on a brick foundation.

The main entrance opens into a stair-hall which runs the depth of the main block of the house and off of which opens two rooms. The stair-case rises vertically with no turns. It has turned balusters and a large, decorative newel post. The north room, the parlor, off the center-passage has two entrances, both of which open into the center hall. A large Italianate slate fireplace is located on the north wall of this room and a modern, deep moulded and denticulated cornice trims the ceiling. Doorways and windows have large moulded surrounds. The doors are composed of heavy wood panels with moulded surrounds.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 2

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The room south of the stair-hall can be entered either through the main center hall or via a small hall which runs along the back of the center staircase and which opens either into the south room or into the kitchen. The south room also has a large moulded cornice, which appears to be original and repeats the large Italianate slate fireplace, moulded door and window surrounds, and the moulded, wood paneled doors found in the north room. The fireplace in this room is on the south wall and is flanked by two shallow, double-door closets. All three of these are constructed into a wall which curves into the main wall at the west end of the room. The use of a curved wall is unusual in Delaware.

South of the five-bay, three-story main block is the already described two-story, shed-roofed wing. Interior evidence, mainly a wood paneled, bracketed and fluted Gothic fireplace and a double-butted wall in the basement, indicates that this wing quite possibly was constructed a decade or so before the main block (which appears to have been butted up to this existing structure) and served as a hall-parlor plan, two-story dwelling until the larger block was built. The exterior siding shows no visible breaks so that if this was an earlier dwelling, Coursey hid that fact in constructing his house. In the southwest corner of what would have been the parlor section of this unit but what is now part of the kitchen is an enclosed winding staircase which ascends to the rooms above. On the south wall of the hall portion of this section is the fireplace, a shallow closet, and in the southwest corner another winding staircase. Both of the latter two have vertical board doors. Under the house is a basement which spans the length of the building. The curved wall in the south room is repeated in the basement. Just behind the curved wall is the double brick wall which lends support to the existence of the south wing as an earlier building. A three level, open brick pit is in the basement under the original section of the building. This pit was used for cold storage by the Coursey family.

Recent alterations have come at the rear (east side) of the house as the hall section of the south wing has been opened up to enlarge the kitchen and as a one-story, shed-roofed addition has been added to the rear to make space for the modern laundry room and bath. While the house has been updated, the building has retained its architectural integrity and reflects the Coursey design.

Associated with the Coursey House are three non-contributing outbuildings. To the east there is an early twentieth-century, one and one-half story, frame, gable front corn crib, and to the southeast there is a large, two and one-half story, gambrel-roofed, block and frame, early twentieth century barn and a more recent low, one-story, metal-covered, shed-roofed machine shed.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 1

=====

The Thomas B. Coursey House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B for its association with Thomas B. Coursey, a significant figure in the economic, social, and political history of late nineteenth-century Kent County. The house is also eligible under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of a dwelling that was characteristic of houses built for the rural elite of central Delaware in the nineteenth century but which have been rapidly disappearing during the past thirty years.

Thomas Boone Coursey, a prominent Kent County mill owner, farmer, and politician, was born in Camden, Delaware, on December 14, 1806. Coursey's parents, Thomas and Mary, had migrated from Caroline County, Maryland to Kent County, Delaware. His father was a carpenter and builder as well as a farmer. The elder Coursey married three times and fathered several children; Thomas was the product of and youngest son of his father's second marriage. Little is known of his mother; she died the same year Coursey was born.

Coursey's younger years are relatively obscure. Tax assessment records suggest that the Coursey family was of the middling sort. Certainly Thomas' father was not wealthy; extant Levy List records for the 1830s, place him well below the financial elite of Murderkill Hundred. Still, young Thomas does not appear to have wanted as a child, and was even reportedly educated in a private school.

As a young man, Coursey followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a skilled carpenter and small farmer. When he was in his thirties he began acquiring the property, which would eventually make him a well-to-do grist and saw miller. In 1838 he made the first of his real estate purchases when he bought approximately nine acres near Camden, Delaware and began operating a mill there. He continued buying property throughout the 1850s and 1860s, including the parcel near Frederica where he operated his principal grist and saw mill and built his home.

Coursey's rise to wealth and prominence can be traced through the public records. The 1834 Levy List for Murderkill Hundred reveals that he had only a horse and a cow, worth a total of \$53. By 1850, the Agricultural Census reveals that he was well above the hundred's average in wheat production, Indian corn production, total livestock value, and improved land holdings (see attached charts). The face value of his farm was \$3,000 and his net worth, inclusive of mill holdings, was estimated at \$6,000. By the 1860 he could afford to build his impressive home, where he lived and conducted his business, social, and political life until his death in 1899. By 1870 his farm was worth \$12,000 and he paid a yearly total of \$900 in wages and board for three white and four black laborers. In that same year he was worth in excess of \$42,000. Besides the servants, he also supported his wife Sallie whom he married in 1832, and his numerous children (he fathered a total of ten but at least three died at an early age).

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 2

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By 1880 Coursey was the fourth largest miller in Murderkill Hundred with a capital outlay of \$10,000. He actually led the hundred in production capacity per day; in the amount of cornmeal, feed, and hominy produced per year; and in the total value of all products produced. His mill was situated on Murderkill Creek adjacent to, and south of his house. The mill had three, 9' falls which powered three, 3' wide turbine wheels capable of producing forty-five horsepower of energy and eighty rotations per minute. Inside the mill, three stone runs were kept busy year round. Coursey could grind 200 bushels of grain a day and yearly ground a total of 6,000 bushels of wheat and more than 7,500 bushels of other grains. From all of this effort came 1,300 barrels of flour, 5,000 pounds of buckwheat, 399,724 pounds of cornmeal, 106,112 pounds of feed, 6,000 pounds of hominy, all for a total of \$10,650 a year. This yearly income, when combined with the value of his farm and mills made him a wealthy man, certainly above where he started in life.

Coursey's rising social status and economic success brought him more and more social responsibilities. His life-long interest and success in scientific agriculture, evident especially in his introduction of guano as a fertilizer in the lower part of the state, led to his election as president of the Kent County Agriculture Society in 1856. In 1865 he was chosen as one of nine directors for the First National Bank of Dover. He was also an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, becoming a member of the Board of Directors for the Wilmington Conference of that denomination. He was also a delegate of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church which met in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1880. His dedication to the church led him to buy a resort house from the Rehoboth Beach Camp Meeting Association in 1877. Coursey was also a friend of the poor and often provided flour for the destitute of his region when no work was to be had.

In 1870, Coursey ran for governor on the Republican ticket and lost. In his early years he appears to have been a Democrat but his convictions on such things as prohibition lead him to the Whig party, then to the Know-Nothings, and to the People's Union party. By 1870 he counted himself among the Republican fold. He was a champion of the blacks, a suffrage supporter, and a defender of President Lincoln. Coursey's run for the governor's seat was handicapped by the fact that Delaware at that time was a predominantly Democratic state and also by the fact that his Democratic opponent, James Ponder, was a far more experienced politician who had served in the Delaware State Senate, including a period as Speaker of that body, for a number of years. Furthermore, his campaign appears to have been stung by charges that Coursey himself was an extreme radical who was depending on black votes to put him into office. This charge undoubtedly hurt his campaign, for though Delaware never seceded, most Delawareans did

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Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 3

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not relish a heightened black role in state affairs. Coursey ran a respectable race considering the odds against him but lost to Ponder by approximately 2,300 votes. This was the first Delaware election after the ratification of the fifteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution. While it gave blacks the right to vote, a right which was enforced by federal marshalls at the polls, the Democratic party kept blacks from voting and were even able to drive some federal marshalls from their posts.

Coursey never again ran for a major state office. Until his death he kept up with his local public service and continued to run his mills and farm. His wife died in 1871 at age 61. Coursey himself lived on until 1899, when he died at age 93. He lived a long life, dedicating himself to his mills, his farm, and the area around him.

The Coursey House is one of the largest surviving nineteenth-century homes in South Murderkill Hundred. The hundred was first occupied in the eighteenth century. Since this hundred stretches across the entire width of the state, nineteen miles at this point, the western area was settled by farmers from Maryland while the eastern region was settled by a mix of Maryland and Virginia citizens and new European immigrants. While some eighteenth century homes survived in the hundred, most of the remaining housing stock is nineteenth century. Frame is the structural system of choice though some brick and some log houses are also found in the hundred.

In the early nineteenth century, South Murderkill Hundred, as well as the rest of Delaware, suffered from an agricultural depression brought about by poor farming practices. The depression began to lessen in the 1830s. At this time men, such as Coursey, began to purchase property and acquire large land holdings or establish themselves as entrepreneurs and factory/mill owners.

Coursey's economic and social rise is typical of the mid-nineteenth century. His large Italianate style house, set above his principal mill, was the physical manifestation of his achievement. While in plan the house is a traditional five-bay, center-passage building, the decorative features of the house set it apart from the common dwelling and from the surviving housing stock from the period. The Italianate style was popular in rural Delaware but complete examples such as the Coursey House are not usual. While complete examples are typical of the small town architecture of Central Delaware, in the rural sections, Italianate features consisted of a flat roof with brackets or classical corner boards or some detailing on a porch or on the door. In that respect, the Coursey House is more typical of urban Delaware architecture than the common farmhouse. But then Coursey was not a farmer but a prosperous mill owner and businessman with interests in town and on the farm.

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Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 4

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Coursey's mill ownership accounts for the large office/ kitchen attached to the south end of the house. While some interior construction and trim elements indicate that this wing might be an earlier building incorporated into the main block of the house, no documentary evidence exists for that conclusion. Without damaging the physical integrity of the wing, it is not possible, at this time, to examine the structural relationship between the wing and the main block. The Gothic-Revival mantel in the wing can either be interpreted as belonging to an earlier construction period or may relate to the use of the Gothic-Revival style for the porch on the front of the house. Since a deliberate effort was made to present a unified external appearance with no visible breaks in the walls, a logical assumption is that the house was built as a unit with a wing housing an office for Coursey and a kitchen.

The rural area around the Coursey House has changed character in the past thirty years. As less people have been needed on the farms, the tenant houses and many of the "home places" have been torn down either because they were not needed or because they interfered with irrigation systems or with plowing. The Coursey House complex is the last nineteenth-century house of the rural elite left in its area and one of the few remaining nineteenth-century houses between Felton and Frederica. The house has survived mainly because the Coursey family occupied the house and property as its home place until 1985. At that time the property was sold to the present owners. The mill property along the creek had been sold to the State of Delaware years prior to that for use as recreation area.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 5

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Increasing Net Worth of
Thomas B. Coursey
1850-1870

Years	<u>1850</u>	<u>1870</u>
Amount of unimproved land	20 acres	12 acres woodland 5 acres other
Amount of improved land	180 acres	73 acres
Cash value of farm	\$2,000	\$12,000
Value of farm implements and machinery	\$100	\$250
Number of Milch [sic] Cows	3	6
Number of Working Oxen	2	2
Number of Cattle	7	4
Number of pigs	4	7
Number of mules	-	2
Number of houses	5	2
Value of Livestock	\$450	\$1,165
Amount of Oats produced in a year	-	350 bushels
Amount of Wheat produced in a year	225 bushels	229 bushels
Amount of Indian Corn produced in a year	400 bushels	600 bushels
Amount of Irish potatoes produced in a year	20 bushels	25 bushels
Amount of sweet potatoes produced in a year	50 bushels	50 bushels
Value of produce for market	\$10	\$100
Amount of butter produced in a year	200 pounds	400 pounds

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 6

=====

Amount of hay produced in a year	5 tons	20 tons
Value of animals slaughtered	\$75	\$414
Amount paid in wages and board	-	\$900
Total value of farm production	-	\$1,851

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 7

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Thomas B. Coursey's Standing in the
Schedule of Manufactures for 1880

Capital	\$10,000
Number of Employees	2 males
Number of months operating	12 months
Number of millstones run	3
Turbine wheels	3 ft. wide, 80 rpm, 45 hp*
Elevator	None
Falls	3- 9 ft. falls
Production per day	200 bushels*
Production per year	6,000 bushels
Value of Production per year	\$6,000
Total value of all materials	\$9,973
Amount of Buckwheat produced per year	\$5,000
Amount of flour produced per year	1,300 barrels
Amount of cornmeal produced per year	399,724 pounds*
Amount of feed produced per year	106,112 pounds*
Amount of hominy produced per year	6,000 pounds*
Total value of all products produced	\$10,650

* Indicates that Coursey led the manufacturers of South Murderkill Hundred in these areas.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8

Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 8

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The Thomas B. Coursey House is located in the Upper Peninsula zone. It represents two themes. The first is that of architecture as a good, intact example of a rural, Italianate-influenced country house like the kind constructed in Kent County and elsewhere. The second theme is that of significant individual. Thomas Boone Coursey (1806 - 1899) was a major economic, social, and political figure in late nineteenth century Kent County. As a property type, the Coursey House is a private, single family dwelling.

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9 Thomas B. Coursey House Page # 1
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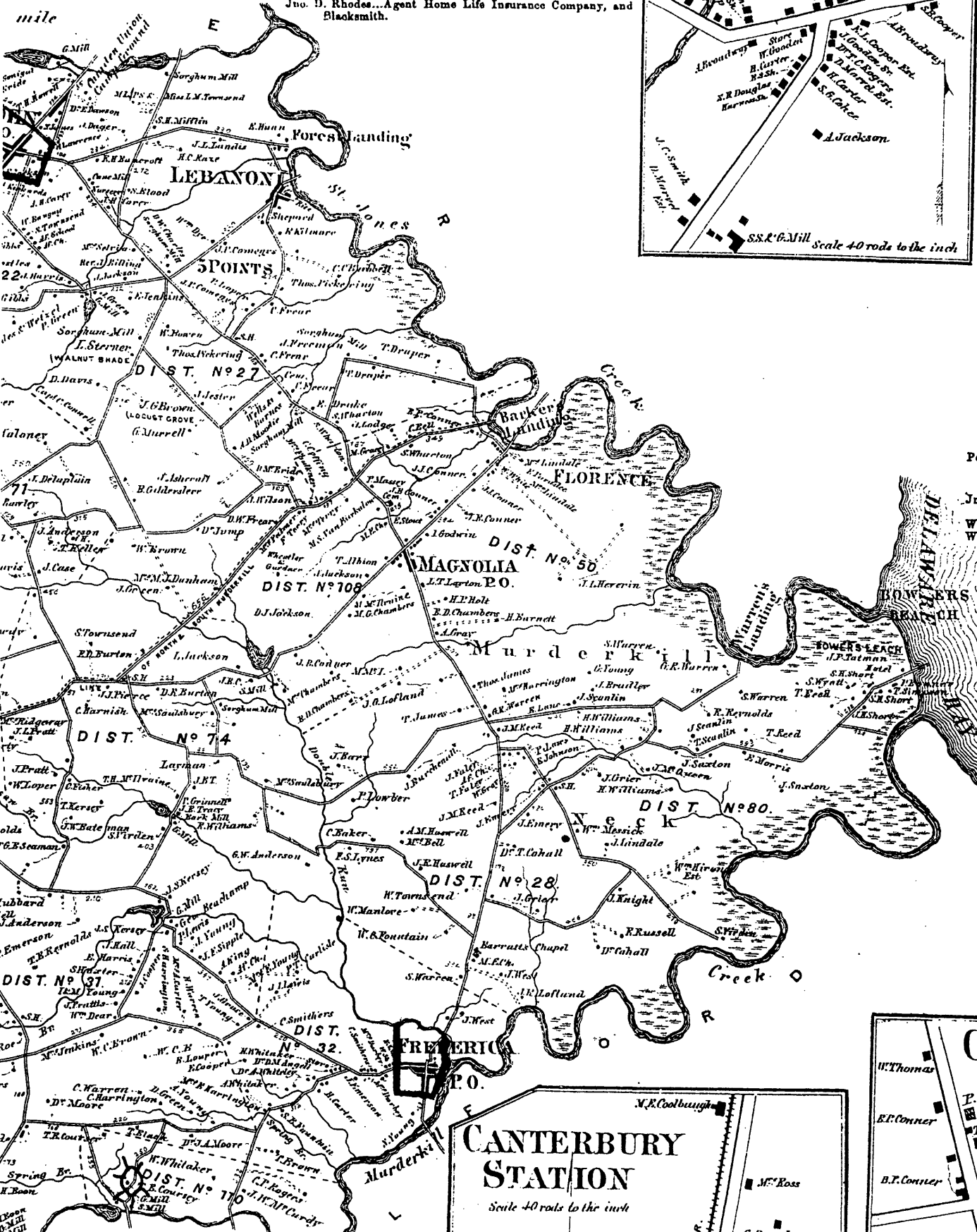
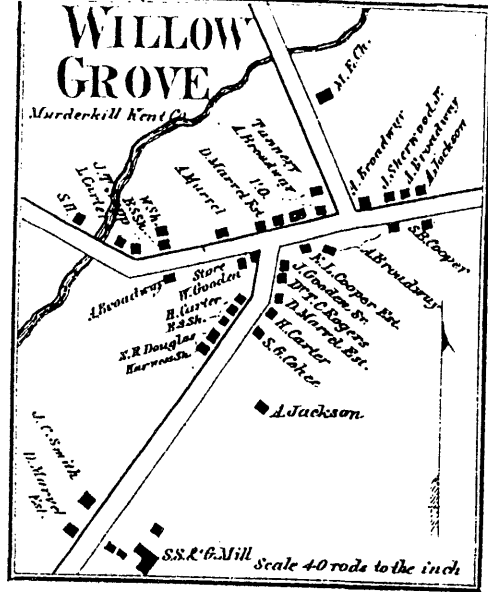
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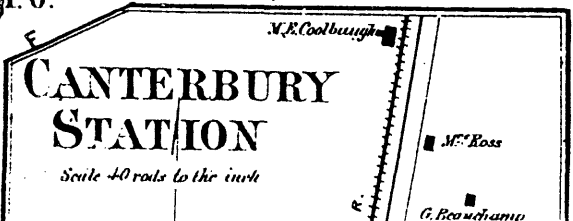
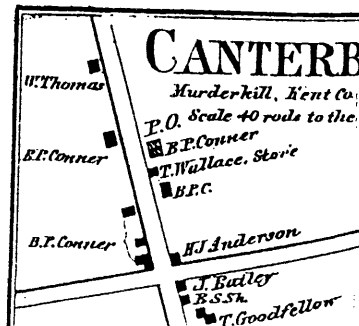
SKILL

Del.
mile

H. L. Draper...Dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Drugs, Hardware, Tinware, Queensware, Cutlery, Boots, Shoes, Hats, Caps, Fancy Notions, &c., and P.M.
 A. Broadway & Son...Manufacturers of Leather, and Dealers in Shoe Findings, Boots, Shoes, Saddlery, Hardware, Harness, &c.
 J. C. Smith...Steam Saw and Grist Mill. Hard Wood Lumber Cut to Order any required size.
 A. Jackson...Surveyor.
 T. C. Rogers, M.D.
 Lem. G. Cohee...Currier,
 Jno. D. Rhodes...Agent Home Life Insurance Company, and Blacksmith.



Peter Wentz...Proprietor of
 Jno. T. Jakes...Dealer in G Adams' Express and
 W. P. Lindale...Miller and
 Wm. McGougal...Lumber D



Kent County Road Map Showing Location of Coursey House

