

**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-3944

Property Name: Cleaver House

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

Located 7000 feet north of Biddle's Corner Road, the Cleaver House is oriented towards the southwest. A small freshet is located 3000 feet west of the house and meanders into Thousand Acre Marsh. The farm is located 1 mile east of the intersection of routes 13 and 3 (Biddles Corner Road). The area being nominated is 1½ acres. This includes an area approximately 1000 by 2500 feet defined by the present yard around the house and includes outbuildings related to the house.

The nominated parcel begins at a point 1 mile northeast of its junction with Rt. 42. The line runs north-northeast for 1,800 feet and makes a 90° turn to the northwest for 300 feet. At this point the line south runs south-southwest for a distance of 1,800 feet. The property is closed off by joining the two points on the north side of Route 2.

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

UTM 18.47120.74760 Tax parcel 13-009.00-016

Owner: Kenneth and Robin Lester
P. O. Box 251
St. Georges, DE 19733

Description:

The Cleaver House is a two-story, seven-bay, gable-roofed farm dwelling built in three different sections. The three-bay central section, and constructed of brick, is the original core of the house, (built in the second half of the eighteenth century). An additional two-bay brick section was constructed to the east adjoining the original core, altering the house configuration from a side-hall to a center-hall plan. This section was built in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. A one-and-a-half story frame kitchen wing was added to the west of

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the central core during the nineteenth century. In the 1960s a frame kitchen ell with a shed roof was constructed to the rear of the kitchen wing. The interior of the house was remodeled during the nineteenth century, and both the interior and exterior were renovated in 1950.

The house presently measures 61 feet long by 17 feet wide, with a kitchen ell measuring 13 feet by 16 feet. The brickwork of the front facade consists of Flemish bond with an English bond watertable. The watertable extends around the east gable end. A four-brick belt course divides the core facade and changes to a two-brick belt course on the second brick addition. These two courses do not meet, but are offset. The two-brick belt course runs around the gable end and continues on the rear of the brick addition. An obvious vertical seam delineates the point where the two brick sections join. The brickwork on the gable ends is three-course common bond. A full basement is present under both brick sections, and is accessible from the interior and exterior. The chimneys are inside the gable ends of the brick sections and on the west gable end of the frame kitchen addition. The window fenestration is symmetrically placed two-over-two sliding sash types. They are trimmed by wooden sills and lintels. The cornices are plain box cornices. The gable roof is presently of asphalt shingle, applied since 1950. Beneath this roof the earlier cedar slab shingles are still extant.

The hooded porch and brick stoop with wooden rails were constructed in 1950. The date stone of "1739", located in the porch, was added at this time. Likewise added in 1950 were all of the double-hung shutters, the white paint and gray trim on the house, and all of the windows.

The frame kitchen wing and ell have been recently aluminum-sided. The window fenestrations of the kitchen wing were enlarged during the 1950 renovations. The early frame kitchen has a stair set located north of the fireplace which leads to an attic above that room. A window fenestration on the north wall is still extant, although it is now located beneath the shed roof of the modern kitchen addition.

The floor plan of the Cleaver House was originally a side-hall, one-room plan. With the addition of the brick section, the plan was changed to a center-hall plan, still one-room deep. The center core room is 17 feet by 15 feet with a raised panel end-wall, chairrail, built-in cabinets, and butterfly shelves. The stair hall is 17 feet by 8 feet. The brick addition room is 17 feet by 13½ feet with a federal mantel and bulls-eye architraves on the door and window frames, and a raised panel end wall with cabinets and shelves.

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The second floor consists of three rooms. The largest is the parlor chamber and is 17 feet by 15 feet. The west gable end is paneled in vertical sheathing, which covers the fireplace opening. This paneling was added in 1950, and a nineteenth century wall partition was removed from the room at this time. The second floor east brick room measures 13 feet by 15 feet, and has a raised panel end wall with built-in cabinets and butterfly shelves. The bulls-eye motif, seen in the room below, is repeated on the door and window architraves. A small room, 8 feet by 6 feet, converted to a bathroom in 1950, is located at the head of the stairs. In 1950, the house was "modernized" with plumbing, heating and electricity.

Two other farm structures are located on the farm and contribute to the nomination. A frame barn, which houses modern dairy fixtures, with an attached carriage shed and milkhouse, is located 180 feet east of the house. A frame, 20 feet by 20 feet, double corn crib is located 65 feet north of the barn, across the modern driveway. The remains of two smaller sheds, one of which was a pump house, and a silo well are present above-ground in the vicinity. To the west of the house a long frame shed and a frame privy were located. These were removed in 1950.

Historical Background and Significance:

The earliest reliable documentary evidence concerning the property is a 1798 deed which shows the property to have been a 330 acre tract belonging to William Carpenter, a farmer in St. Georges Hundred. In that year he divided his lands by will among his children, and his son Richard Carpenter received the 111 acre tract on which the Cleaver House is located. In the 1803 tax assessment, Richard is recorded as owning 112 acres, of which 32 are unimproved and 80 are improved. On the property were four buildings: a house, kitchen, barn, and granary.

In 1807 Richard Carpenter sold the farm to Elisha James. James was a farmer of Pencader Hundred, and in 1812 he sold the tract to John Sutton. Sutton was listed as residing in the town of St. Georges in Red Lion Hundred. The 1816 tax assessment records Sutton as having 111 acres assessed at \$2775. On the property were a "brick dwelling, barn and stable" - the first documentary evidence of a brick house on the property. Sutton's estate contained 75 acres of land, 10 acres of woodland, and 26 acres of marsh and cripple.

Sutton retained the farm until 1827, when he sold it to James and Hannah McMullin. In 1837, John Eagle purchased the property from McMullin for \$4800. Eagle evidently constructed a new dwelling on the property 2 miles north of the original house (possibly the J. B. Nelson house, "Quiet Home", shown on Beers' Atlas), for he sold the front 80 acres to John Cleaver in 1844 for \$4400.

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The Cleaver family was a prominent one in the area, and one of them, Joseph Cleaver, was a prominent grain merchant in Port Penn. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century the farm remained in the Cleaver family. The Rea and Price Map lists George Cleaver as the owner; Beers' Atlas records J. Cleaver; Hopkins Map (1881) and Baists' Atlas (1893) show a William A. Cleaver. No archival evidence could be found to document any of these shifts in ownership. All of the Delaware state directories consulted record the occupants of the house as farmers.

Throughout the period the property was used as a farm. Agricultural census data reveals that the Cleaver farm was engaged in producing diversified crops - Indian corn, wheat, oats, peas and beans, and Irish and sweet potatoes. The Cleaver House inhabitants were evidently not swept up in the "Peach Boom" for they kept only a handful of apple trees on the property. Producing dairy goods and raising livestock were the major items of market consumption of the farm. Although only 80 acres, the farm was probably too large for the family to maintain alone, and hired labor was recorded as being employed by the Cleavers. The market value of the farm remained at about \$8000 throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Taking into account all of these facts, it seems that the Cleavers were a conservative family who owned a prosperous, productive farm which was run following the general regional agricultural trends of the period.

The growth and adaptation of the house was probably dictated by the regional economic trends of the period, and is reflective of them. The addition of the brick section, which doubled the size of the house, probably occurred in the early nineteenth century during the Carpenter occupation. This addition changed the house from a side-hall to a center-hall plan. The frame kitchen was likely added at this time as well. The farm structures that are present today were constructed in the mid to late nineteenth century, but are probably located in the vicinity of the earlier barn and granary.

The Cleaver House and farm is a good example of the cultural processes that affected St. Georges Hundred in the nineteenth century. The reapportionment of the land and the fragmentation of the property through a period of quick land sales between 1827 and 1844 has been shown. All of these changes took place in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, coincident with the population shifts, economic changes, and industrial and agricultural improvements which were occurring in New Castle County.

Nomination by Wade Catts