

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	NOV 26 1980
DATE ENTERED	APR 18 1982

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Coombe Historic District
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

W of Felton on
DE 12 and S.R. 281
STREET & NUMBER
intersection of Rt. 12 and Co. Rd. 281
CITY, TOWN
Felton V.I.C.
STATE
Delaware
CODE
10
VICINITY OF (2 1/2 miles west)
One
COUNTY
Kent
CODE
001
NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" 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	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Cemetery

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
(See owners list)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Kent County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
The Green

CITY, TOWN

STATE
Delaware

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Delaware Cultural Resource Survey (K-1422)

DATE
1979
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS Old State House, The Green, P.O. Box 1401

CITY, TOWN
Dover

STATE
Delaware

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR
 DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Coombe Historic District is located on Route 12 about 2½ miles west of the Kent County town of Felton, in an agricultural area of generally flat topography with interspersed patches of poorly-drained woodlands. The principal elements of the district are the brick Benjamin Coombe House, built in 1778, and the frame Caldwell House, built about 1872, with their respective outbuildings. The Coombe and Caldwell houses lie on opposite sides of the road connecting the early-nineteenth-century town of Frederica, Delaware on the Murderkill River, with Choptank Bridge, some 25 miles to the west in Maryland. The district also encompasses the Hopkins Cemetery, begun in the late-nineteenth century, and three historic archaeological house sites, as well as an area of prehistoric occupation that was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 as a component of the Hughes Early Man Complex.

The Coombe House lies about 400 feet south of the road in a grouping of trees and frame outbuildings, the eighteenth-century facade to the east. In the 1880's, the orientation of the house was reversed by remodeling the exterior. A full facade hip-roofed porch supported by four hollow wooden columns was added to the west elevation, proclaiming the change. A coating of stucco, scored in blocks measuring 10 inches by 18 inches to resemble common bond coursing, was applied to the exterior and now conceals the bonding pattern of the original brickwork. Members of the present owner's family recall an oral account indicating that thirteen steel hatchets were worn down in the process of scoring the brick to insure a good bond for the new stucco. The house is two stories high and two rooms deep with an unbalanced four-bay arrangement of openings on the original facade and a symmetrical three-bay on the opposite elevation (now the facade). Rising from the gable ends of the principal block are centrally-located interior end chimneys which vent corner hearths within. The eaves of the wood-shingled gable roof, now covered by composition shingles, overhang the gable ends and are defined by a shallow box cornice with partial returns added during the remodeling. Incised in the stucco on the second story of the west elevation between the central and south windows is the date "1778" within a five-point star.

On the south gable end is a low two-story, single-pile kitchen wing featuring a most unusual exterior end chimney with sloped weatherings. The kitchen wing is also stuccoed but it is unscored and has a steeply-sloped, shed-roofed, wrap-around porch on the west elevation now covered with corrugated tin.

The windows of the principal block have heavy mortise and tenoned architraves with ovolo mouldings, holding nine-over-six pane sashes on the first floor and six-over-six sash on the second floor. The few remaining shutters on the first story date from the 1880's remodeling, and feature flat panels framed by applied Grecian ogee mouldings against the stiles and rails. They are mounted on cast iron pintles screwed to the window jambs and are secured open by wrought iron shutter dogs with scrolled rat tails and "penny" terminals.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 1778, 1882

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Coombe Historic District is significant to the heritage of Delaware for its unusual mixture of archaeological resources, both prehistoric and historic, in combination with two excellent examples of domestic architecture from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This well-preserved, interdisciplinary assemblage provides a unique opportunity for a site-specific examination of the various ways man has responded to the environmental and cultural fabric of southwestern Kent County, from approximately 10,000 years ago to the present.

The prehistoric component of the Coombe Historic District represents some of the earliest human occupations (8,500-11,000 B.P.) on the Delmarva Peninsula. The well-drained knoll triangulated by the Coombe House, the road, and the Hopkins Cemetery was listed in the National Register in 1979 as "Area F" of the Hughes Early Man Complex. As a whole, this complex was seasonally occupied as hunting camps which have yielded lithic materials, reconfirming the technological continuity from the Paleo Indian Period through the Early Archaic.

One of the first historic references to the area is a grant of land in 1715 by William Penn, Proprietor of Pennsylvania and the Three Lower Counties on Delaware, to John French of New Castle. The large, square, 580-acre tract, called "The Cave," was subsequently transferred and divided through sale and probate. In 1776, Benjamin Coombe, a Quaker Kent County farmer, purchased the western half of the "Cave" from Philemon Dickinson of Philadelphia.

The Benjamin Coombe House, built in 1778, represents an important departure from the architectural norms evidenced in the majority of brick Delaware Georgian plantation houses of the second half of the eighteenth century. With few exceptions, the more substantial houses of this period were either of the hall-parlor-plan or contained two single-pile cells divided by a stair hall, with the double-pile, side stair-hall house plan coming into more common use at the end of the century. The Coombe House, however, is of an uncommon double-pile, double-cell configuration that has not been discerned elsewhere in the state.

Recently, there has been much scholarly discussion concerning the existence and nature of a Quaker architectural aesthetic. The Coombe House, with its comparatively austere interiors, would appear to be an exemplum of the commonly-held notion of the functional simplicity of "Quaker Georgian" architecture. Though Benjamin Coombe was very wealthy, most of the rooms in his house are devoid of unnecessary woodwork, featuring only the most basic forms of fireplace and doorway architraves, simple chair rails and baseboards. The panelled dados of the "dining room" and common room seem almost an obligatory concession to visually define the more public and formal rooms of the house. The very practical interior shutters of these two rooms fold, out of sight, into the jambs.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Beers, D.G. Atlas of the State of Delaware. Philadelphia, Pomeroy & Beers, 1868.
 Byles, Map of Kent County, Delaware, 1859
 Clark, Elmer T. ed. Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury. London, Epworth Press, 1958.
 Public Archives Commission, Delaware Archives, Wilmington, 1911-16.
 Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Delaware: 1609-1888. Reprint ed. Port Washington, N.Y. Kenikat Press, 1972.

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 34 acres

UTM REFERENCES

(SEE CONTINUATION SHEET)

A	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	B	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	D	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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

Dean E. Nelson, Historian

1980

ORGANIZATION

Delaware Division of Historical & Cultural Affairs

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Old State House, The Green, P.O. Box 1401

TELEPHONE

(302) 736-5685

CITY OR TOWN

Dover

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.

Deputy

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

David R. [Signature]

TITLE Chief, Bureau of Archaeology & Historic Preservation

DATE

10/17/80

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Anna Marie [Signature]

DATE

1/8/82

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST *Anna Marie [Signature]*

DATE

4-8-82

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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Coombe Historic District

CONTINUATION SHEET

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Benjamin Coombe House - Mr. Joseph S. Hughes
R.D. #2
Box 408
Felton, Delaware 19943

Caldwell House Mr. Paul Hughes, Sr.
R.D. #2
Felton, Delaware 19943

(ownership and addresses confirmed 12/3/81 at Kent County Board of Assessments)

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The first floor of the main block has an uncommon four-room configuration laid out in a double-pile, double-cell plan. Three of the rooms have corner hearths and the fourth room, situated behind the original recessed, panelled entrance-way, contains the staircase to the second floor. Much of the staircase was altered in 1954 when a bathroom was added in this room. The interior doors of this room lead to the two more formal rooms of the house, the common room and another perhaps best termed a "dining room", as it adjoins the kitchen.

The largely unaltered interior detailing throughout the house is very plain, lacking the fully panelled end walls typical of Delaware interiors in this period. The walls and ceiling are of whitewashed plaster-over-lath with double, raised, fielded-panel dados and chair rails as the most prominent features in the common room and dining room. In addition, both rooms feature flat-panelled interior shutters folding into the embrasures. The simple corner fireplace architrave in the common room is comprised of two planes of cyma-edged moulding over a beaded-edge element, as are all the doorway architraves. A simple federal mantel shelf in the common room is a much later addition. The plastered chimney breast rises to a cove formed by the cribbing for the corner chamber hearths above. All of the doors feature double raised fielded panels mounted on butt hinges, though the original locks have been replaced by porcelain-knobbed cast iron box locks of the mid-nineteenth century.

The chamber floor plan echoes that of the first floor. Above the staircased room is a large, open landing with a turned walnut newel and handrail supported by square white-painted balusters. The chambers are fitted with corner hearths with simple architraves, chair rails and baseboards. A small windowed antechamber off of the common room chamber is nestled beneath the boxed winder leading to the attic. The chair rail has been removed from the common room chamber. All of the woodwork is painted a medium gray, apparently the original coat of paint, offering a contrast to the whitewashed walls.

The attic is unfinished, except for the wide board flooring. The roof framing is of the common rafter type with numbered, collarless, white cedar rafters, half-lapped and pegged at the ridge which supports cherry lath nailers for wood shingles.

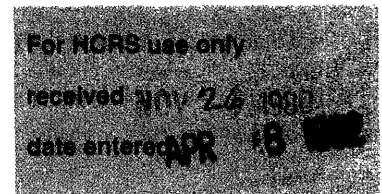
The first floor of the kitchen wing lies several feet below the floor level of the main block and consists of one large room dominated by a cooking hearth on the south wall. The beaded ceiling joists are whitewashed. Above is a single large room, later sub-divided into two smaller ones. There is no doorway between the kitchen chambers and those of the main block.

The cellar is reached by means of a bulkhead stairs on the west elevation at the juncture of the kitchen wing and main block. The cellar is sub-divided into four units by two load-bearing brick walls, one running from gable to gable, and the other at right angles to it spanning the facade wall to the rear wall. The

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joists are sawn vertically by machine and the floor is paved by bricks laid out in a running bond. Massive arched corner chimney supports are set into the gable end foundation walls, with a small corner fireplace in the part of the cellar beneath the entryroom on the first floor. The tops of the floor joists of the dining room are channeled and support battens, which cover the interstices of the floorboards. This manner of flooring occurs only in this room.

Immediately to the south of the Coombe House are five late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century frame outbuildings of various sizes with gable roofs and vertical board sidings.

On the north side of the road is the second standing residential structure of the district, the Caldwell House. Built in 1882, according to the present owners, the Caldwell House is a two-and-one-half-story, center-passage-plan frame farmhouse with a balanced three-bay facade and deep, single-pile principal block. Its most striking exterior architectural elements include the central facade cross gable and the overhanging eaves with regularly-spaced brackets along the cross gable, as well as the partially-turned box cornices and the gable eaves. The front slope of the composition-shingled gable roof is broken by gable-roofed dormers, also with deep eaves, framing two-over-two pane sash windows. Set within the cross gable is a round-headed, two-over-two pane sash window providing additional illumination to the attic. All of the windows of the first and second story of the main block and wing are also of two-over-two sash, flanked on the first story by solid-paneled shutters with applied mouldings and on the second story by operable louvered shutters, all of which are mounted on cast iron pintles and secured open by cast iron clamshell shutterdogs screw-mounted to the exterior weatherboard. The weatherboard has a narrow exposure with slim corner boards on the exterior angles. A full facade hip-roofed porch with bracketed eaves is supported by four square posts. Paired brick interior chimneys capped by terra cotta chimney pots rise on either side of the center hall and exit at the ridge of the roof. At present, the house is painted a medium gray with bright red contrasting trim. The depth of the main block of the Caldwell House suggests that it is two rooms deep, but that is not the case; each of the first floor rooms run the depth of the main block.

To the rear is a two-story kitchen wing of materials and form in keeping with the principal block. There is an interior end chimney at the rear of the wing. An "L"-shaped, hip-roofed porch covers the area in the angle of the main block and wing.

As with the Coombe House, there are several late-nineteenth-century frame outbuildings, here poised around the work area west of the house.

Fronting on County Road 281 to the west of the Coombe House is the Hopkins Cemetery, begun in the late-eighteenth century and containing many headstones marking the final resting place of the many members of the Coombe family and the Hopkins family, who came to own the Coombe House and lands in the mid-nineteenth-century.

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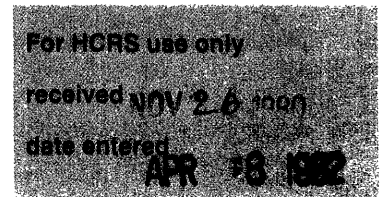
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Three historic archaeological sites in the immediate vicinity of the Coombe and Caldwell houses and the cemetery have been identified through scatters of brick and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ceramics, glass, and other artifacts by one of the property owners who has made surface collections from the sites. Two of the sites coincide with buildings charted on Beer's Atlas of Delaware (1868). The concentration of artifacts in the field just north of the Caldwell House is listed as being owned by "C. Hurnish." On the edge of the modern section of the Hopkins Cemetery is a site listed in the atlas as the "J. K. Bernight" House. In the field between the cemetery and the Coombe House is another concentration of historic artifacts associated with a vanished structure of unknown identity. The portion of the district previously listed in the National Register in 1979 for prehistoric significance is a slight knoll between the Coombe House and Route 12, just east of the cemetery.

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In whatever ways his house is exemplary of Quaker aesthetic, paradoxically Coombe was not a particularly devout Quaker. In his journal, the great Methodist circuit rider, Francis Asbury, noted Coombe's Quakerism on a visit to the family

Friday, (November 17, 1780) set out for Murderkill (Hundred), stopping at Coomb's that night. I spoke to the man upon his mysticism, and to the family about their souls.

Coombe and his sons were slave owners and it was not until the early-nineteenth century that the family began to free them. The manumission documents are recorded in the Kent County deed books. Unlike most Quakers, Benjamin Coombe was also prominent in local military affairs during the American Revolution. He, or perhaps his namesake son, enlisted as a private in the Dover Troop of Light Horse in August of 1777. The senior Coombe was elected one of two sub-lieutenants of the Kent County Militia in May of 1778 by the Council of the Delaware State under the militia law. Other patriotic activities included membership on the Boston Relief Committee in 1775 as a representative from Kent County. In yet another divergence from Quaker custom, Coombe and his descendants marked their family graves with fully developed headstones. Located in the Hopkins Cemetery within the district, they offer a stylistic contrast with the later nineteenth-century headstones of the Hopkins family who owned the Coombe House by the mid-nineteenth century.

The Caldwell House, built c. 1882, is a crisp example of the Victorian eclecticism in architecture during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The structure utilizes a traditional symmetrical center-stairhall-plan, made more complex visually through the use of a Gothic Revival cross gable and by the addition of Italianate elements, including double arch-headed windows set in the attic level of the gable ends and the use of brackets along the entire length of the main block eaveline, including the cross gable. Both the Caldwell House and Coombe House retain a number of late-nineteenth-century frame agricultural out-buildings underscoring the agrarian function of the respective complexes. The Caldwell House stands as an architectural foil for the Coombe House and a comparison of the two reveals many of the changes and transitions in building practices spanned by a century of time. It is highly probable that the construction of the consciously fashionable Caldwell House was a direct impetus to the subsequent stucco and porch remodelling of its neighbor.

The three historical archaeological sites in the district contain fragmented ceramic artifacts suggesting an occupation date as early as the mid-eighteenth century. It is likely that two of the structures represented by these scatters stood past the mid-nineteenth century with locations and ownership recorded in Beer's Atlas of Delaware in 1868. Benjamin Coombe's will of 1798 makes reference to several other dwellings occupied by his sons as being in the immediate vicinity of his own plantation house. An archaeological investigation of these three dwelling sites in conjunction with one of the Coombe House, could provide much otherwise unobtainable information about the intra-family heirarchies as reflected in dwelling evidences and material cultural remains.

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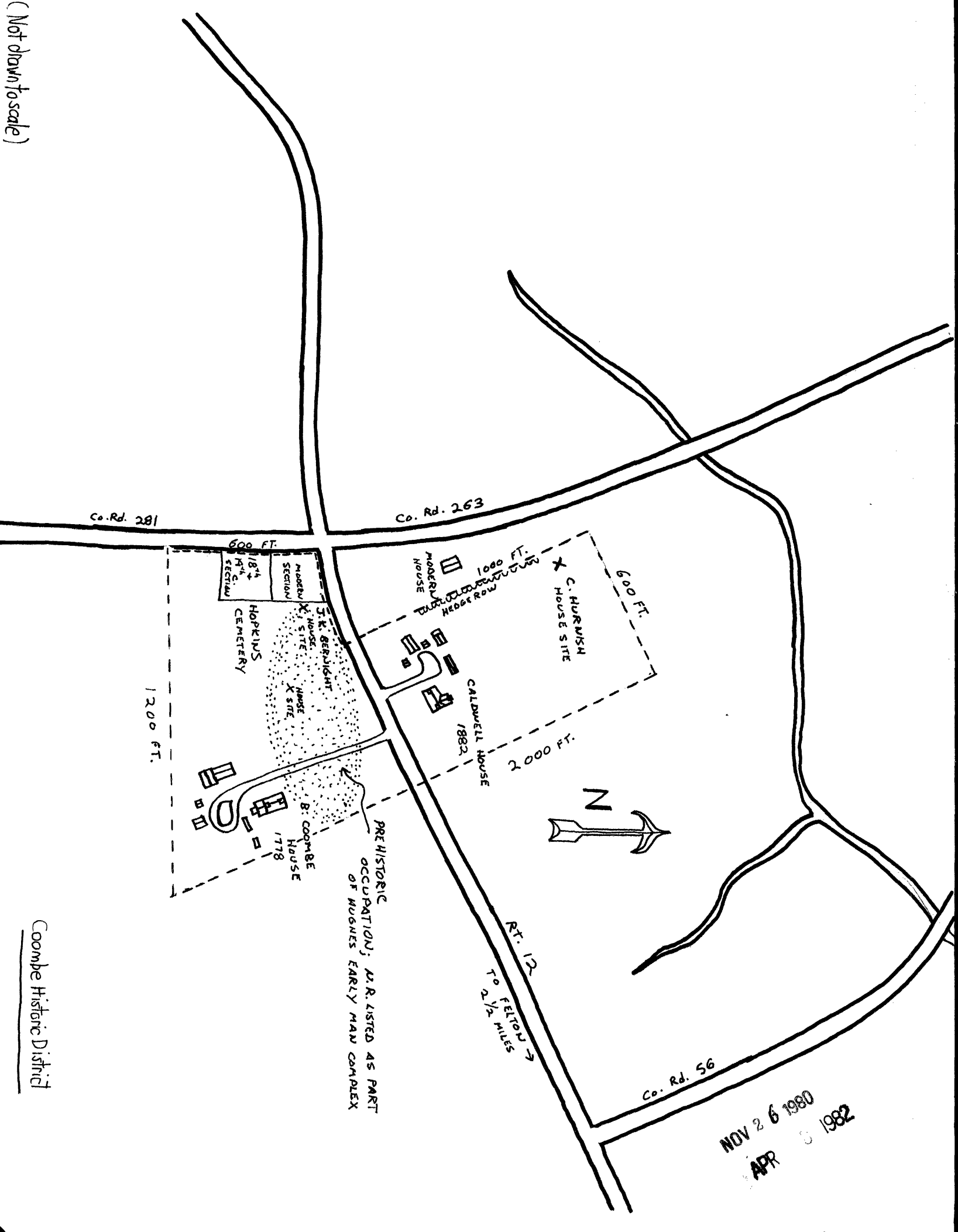
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UTM A 18/446380/4317300
B 18/446630/4316750
C 18/446200/4316750
D 18/446190/4316860
E 18/446340/4316820
F 18/446210/4317220

Verbal Boundary Description:

The district is bounded as follows: Beginning at a point 1000 feet northwest of Delaware Road 12 and approximately 650 feet northeast of Kent County Road 263 thence 2000 feet southeast to a point 1000 feet southeast of Delaware Road 12 and 1200 feet east of Kent County Road 281 thence east 1200 feet to the east edge of the right-of-way of Kent County Road 281 thence 600 feet north to the edge of the right-of-way of the southeast corner of the intersection of Delaware Road 12 and County Road 281 thence approximately 300 feet east to a point on the southern edge of the right-of-way of Delaware Road 12 thence 1000 feet northwest to a point approximately 40 feet east of County Road 263 and 980 feet northwest of Delaware Road 12 thence 600 feet northeast to the point of beginning.

Not drawn to scale



Coombe Historic District

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APR 10 1982