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National Park Service

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K-1315

Property Name: A. Poinsett House

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

The house sits on a farm of about 210 acres, located on the north side of Delaware Route 6 and east of Road 126. The nominated property includes a tract of land 750 feet on either side of the driveway and 1,000 feet north of Route 6. This contains 34.4 acres and would include the agricultural buildings to the north and west of the house.

Owner: Antone J. Kujawski
R. D. 1, Box 852
Clayton, DE 19938

Description:

The Poinsett House was built in the mid-eighteenth century as a tenant house by the Blackiston family. The original core is a 2-bay, one-room-plan brick house, 20 feet by 18 feet. The facade is laid in Flemish bond, while the remaining sides are laid in five-course common bond. A three-course belt course once was located on the facade, but it has been removed. Later additions to the building in the early-nineteenth century include two log sections. One is a wing 24 feet by 16 feet, and the other log wing is 18 feet by 16 feet. Both are attached to the west gable end. The house faces south.

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While originally part of the Blackiston family lands known as "Deer Park," by the nineteenth century the lands were in the hands of the Whitby family as a tenant farm. When Joseph Whitby died, the farm passed to his son John. The Kent County Orphan's Court in 1823 contains the following description of the house: "Brickroom about 20 feet by 18 feet. generably in tolerable order except one of the porches and some of the window sills, a log wing adjoining about 24 feet y 16 feet covered with weatherboard..., a log kitchen adjoining the last room about 18 feet by 16 feet which wants repair..." At this time the farm had a brick smokehouse, a brick milk house, a log granary with a cellar, a log corn crib, a small log house, a small log corn crib, a frame barn, a log stable and corn crib and another log stable. There was also a 106-tree apple orchard and a garden with a brick wall. The cleared land was 180 acres. The total acreage was not given.

The trustees of the estate ordered repairs and maintenance of the house. The porches were repaired; the porch on the front of the house still retains its vernacular Greek-Revival features, even though it has been screened-in. The porch on the rear of the house has been replaced by a 1-story shed wing.

The interior of the house has not been altered and retains its original floor plan. Recent exterior changes include covering the log wings with asbestos shingle and removing the west chimney. The asbestos shingle was placed over the center door on the 3-bay kitchen wing. In addition to the house, there are also a number of agricultural buildings including barns, sheds, and large metal silos.

Historic Background:

Built as a one-room-plan dwelling, the Poinsett House was a tenant house until the early part of this century. The house is shown on the maps by Mason & Dixon in determining the boundary between Delaware and Maryland in 1763. Land sale records during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Kent County were not always recorded at the courthouse and it is difficult to trace the ownership of the properties. In 1823, when Joseph Whitby's estate was being settled, the land was occupied by James Green. Whitby owned the adjoining 200-acre farm,

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By 1859, the land was owned by the firm of Poinsett and Pratt, according to Byle's Atlas of Kent County. The owner in 1868, as listed on Beer's Atlas of Delaware was A. Poinsett. The land sales from Whitby to Poinsett were not recorded. Poinsett was a Wilmington merchant and owned various parcels of land in Kent County. When Poinsett's estate was being settled in 1872, the farm had 237 acres.

Statement of Significance:

The Poinsett House is eligible for listing under Criterion C, as an example of the maintenance of two archaic building traditions. While brick appears to be the preferred building material of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century in Kenton Hundred, the other surviving brick houses are much more substantial dwellings. This is the only one-room-plan dwelling in the hundred. The addition of the one-room, 2-story log wing immediately to the west of the core effectively converted the house into a hall-parlor-type, 4-bay dwelling with interior gable end chimneys. The kitchen wing most likely was the most recent addition to the dwelling.