

PH 0085103

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| STATE: Delaware | |
| COUNTY: Kent | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | DEC 31 1974 |

1. NAME

COMMON:
Somerville

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
On Route 42, the Dover Kenton Road, 1 mile east of Kenton *on DE 42*

CITY OR TOWN:
Kenton *vic*

STATE: Delaware CODE: 10 COUNTY: Kent CODE: 001

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Mr. & Mrs. W. Paul Masten

STREET AND NUMBER:
RD 1, Box 270

CITY OR TOWN: Clayton STATE: Delaware CODE: 10

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
Kent County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:
The Green

CITY OR TOWN: Dover STATE: Delaware CODE: 10

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Kent County Planning and Zoning Survey #27

DATE OF SURVEY: Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Kent County Regional Planning Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
45 The Green

CITY OR TOWN: Dover STATE: Delaware CODE: 10

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Delaware

COUNTY: Kent

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ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

DEC 31 1974

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)

Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Ruins Unexposed

(Check One)

Altered Unaltered

(Check One)

Moved Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Somerville, so named in the deed conveying the land to Nicholas Ridgely in 1798, is architecturally one of the finest houses in Kenton Hundred. Changes in its exterior and interior fabric have little altered its elegance. Situated on a tract which has remained basically unchanged since its boundaries were established during the eighteenth century, it commands a visually impressive site on the Dover-Kenton Road.

Standing back from the road beyond a wide expanse of wooded lawn, Somerville today is a working farm; the many outbuildings behind the house give evidence of a long history of farming. The house is built entirely of brick, laid in Flemish bond on the facade and five course common bond on the sides and rear of the main section. It is painted a cream color, which probably was applied during the nineteenth century. The facade is five bays wide, with a belt course. The center bay of the facade contains a large double doorway crowned by a fanlight and covered by a Victorian portico. At the roofline, this bay features a Victorian cross gable.

A line in the brickwork west of the front door indicates that the western part of the house was added, converting a side-hall house into a center-hall house. On the east end of the house is a small, lower, two-story wing, which is set back from the facade. This wing contains a belt course and a Flemish bond facade, continuing the design of the main block. There is no water table

The present roof covering is modern composition shingle; the cornice, window frames, and exterior doors all appear to date from a single renovation during the nineteenth century. The cross gable and the shutters apparently were added during the same period.

Physical evidence indicates that the rear wing, which extends north from the original section of the main house, was the first part constructed. When this wing stood alone, the Flemish-bond western wall appears to have been a facade. The walls of this wing have been raised, and porches have been built along the sides. The original brickwork is, however, still visible, exhibiting a belt course but no water table. When the walls were raised, the new work was laid in common bond. The other two visible exterior walls are laid in an unusual four-course common bond. The belt course of this wing does not contain the projections that are found on the facade belt course. There is no cellar under the rear wing.

The large rear cellar door of the main house has been bricked up, but evidence in the wall indicates that it was similar to the large cellar door that has survived on the 'John Dickinson Mansion.' Like the Dickinson Mansion cellar door, it was also situated next to the back first-floor door, under the main staircase.

In the rear wing, the interior shows the mark of many owners, but the front part of the house retains much of its original character.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

c. 1798, c. 1806

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Somerville, the home of Nicholas Ridgely, reflects the statesman's awareness of the architectural taste of his times.

When Ridgely bought the property in 1798, the farm contained 455 acres, part of an 1800-acre tract. The property had long been in the tenure of Benjamin Eubanks, who may have lived in the present rear wing of the house.

Ridgely's purchase was bounded on two sides by converging streams, and then contained land on the opposite side of the Dover-Kenton Road which is now in other hands.

The tract known as Partnership or Mill Range, of which Somerville is part, was originally granted to John Richardson and Francis Whitwell in 1683. It was, in turn, part of the Manor of Frieth, a 10,000-acre manor that William Penn had laid out for himself. In 1703, when Robert French of New Castle bought the land from the Hambly family, he found it necessary to reimburse the original grantees for payments that were still due. Having cleared the title, French left Partnership to his son Daniel in 1713, with the proviso that it would descend to Daniel's sisters Mary and Elizabeth if he should die without issue. Robert French's widow, Mary, married James Gordon and then Nicholas Ridgely, the grandfather of the Chancellor Nicholas Ridgely who later bought the tract.

Robert French's will created an estate tail, which kept the property in the hands of his heirs for another generation. Elizabeth French Finney's son inherited his mother's half share; Mary French, daughter of Robert, married James Gardner. On December 13, 1758, James and Mary Gardner and David Finney had the Partnership tract divided by a writ of Partione Facienda. David Finney got, as his half share, 1206 acres. His aunt and uncle received 594 acres, including the site of Somerville, as their share. Having docked the entail on his portion, David Finney sold part of it in 1763.

The Gardner half of the property, because it contained less acreage, must have been more valuable. The tenant was paying £80 per year rent, and Gardner's will dated 1773 indicates that there was a mill on the property.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Kent County Land Grants, 1680-1743, fo.21
 New Castle County Will Book C-1, fo. 1 - 9
 Kent County Deed Books C-1, p.88; R-1, pp. 37 ff.; D-1, p.57; F-2, p. 59
 Kent County Warrants and Surveys: R3 #11; F4 #82; F4 #82A; F4 #82B
 Kent County Will Books : Q-1, fo. 154-160; A-18, fo.214, 249; A-33, fo. 1.
 deValinger, Leon, Jr., and Virginia E. Shaw, editors. A Calendar of
 Ridgely Family Letters, 1742-1899. Dover, 1951.
 Huffington, William. The Delaware Register and Farmers Magazine,
 February and July 1838. (SEE ALSO CONTINUATION SHEET)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | O R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | |
| | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | |
| NW | 39 ° 13 ' 15 " | 75 ° 38 ' 51 " | | 0 | " | |
| NE | 39 ° 13 ' 25 " | 75 ° 38 ' 51 " | | | " | |
| SE | 39 ° 13 ' 25 " | 75 ° 38 ' 35 " | | | " | |
| SW | 39 ° 13 ' 15 " | 75 ° 38 ' 35 " | | | " | |

NO
247

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 25

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY: | CODE |
|--------|------|---------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

RECORDED
NOV 21 1974
NATIONAL REGISTER

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
 Joan M. Norton, Historic Site Surveyor

ORGANIZATION: Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs DATE: 10/10/74

STREET AND NUMBER:
 Hall of Records

CITY OR TOWN: Dover STATE: Delaware CODE: 10

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name Dr. Ronald M. Finch
 Title State Historic Preservation Officer
 Date 11/18/74

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Dr. R. M. Norton
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date DEC 31 1974

ATTEST:
W. J. [Signature]
 Keeper of the National Register
 Date DEC 31 1974

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(7, Description, Continued)

The earlier date of the eastern room is demonstrated by the presence of a dog-eared bolection moulding around the fireplace and the crossetting of the overmantel panel. At the center, this ovolo moulding around the overmantel breaks to turn downward, meeting the mantel shelf. The fluting and punch-and-gouge decoration in this mantel could have been added to a simpler original. On the chimney breast below the cornice is a panel of punch-and-gouge ornament that almost certainly was added. The cornice in this room is plain, as is the baseboard and chair rail. Moulding details match those of the hallway.

The exceptionally wide double doorway and the staircase dominate the central hallway. The doors themselves are Victorian, but the door frame moulding appears to be original. This doorway is the largest in the area, if not in Kent County, for the period. The open-string stair is panelled below; the space below the first flight is completely filled by a single raised wooden panel. The staircase, the back door, and a corner closet below the upper flight completely fill the width of the hallway at the rear.

In the hallway, the cornice, chair rail, and baseboard repeat the mouldings found in the east room. The moulding under the stair risers is also identical to the chair rail. Both of the doors leading from the rooms into the hall are six-panelled. The door between the hall and the west room is finished on both sides with raised panels, a feature that is rare in Kent County joinery. Since this door cuts through the thick brick wall, it is surrounded by a panelled reveal the full thickness of the wall. All the mouldings around the doorways in the front section are identical, indicating that the two parts were built within a few years of one another.

The western first-floor room and the bedroom above were probably added around 1806 when Nicholas Ridgely married. They are the finest rooms in the house.

In both downstairs rooms, the mantelpieces and chimney breasts intrude into the room, without the panelled endwalls that were common during earlier periods. The chimney breast in the western room is particularly large and refined in its detailing. Fluted pilasters flank a five-foot fireplace opening. Over the fireplace, a swag effect on the frieze is created with reeding and punch-and-gouge work. Three panels form the overmantel. In the large central panel is a painted landscape; tradition states that this picture represents the Dover-Kenton Road at one of the branches that form the natural boundaries of the property. The painting apparently was added during the nineteenth century by an unknown genre artist in the style of the Hudson River painters. Small cupboards are let into the sides of the chimney breast, but there is no other wainscot or panelling in the room. The cornice in this room is elaborate, with punchwork patterns separated by gouged swags on the frieze between the dentil course and the crown moulding. The chair rail in this room is heavier than in the other first story rooms. The baseboard also differs from the others. An unusual feature of this

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(7, Description, Continued, 2)

room is an iron strap in the ceiling, which appears to be part of the hearth structure for the room above.

Being the same size as the western parlor, the room above was quite large by comparison with other bedchambers of the period. A fully-panelled endwall surrounds the fireplace. The mantelpiece is a less elaborate version of the one downstairs, without the reeding and punchwork. The center panel of the frieze contains fluting arranged in a swag effect with gouged sunburst patterns above. The panelling above the mantel repeats the three-part arrangement of the parlor fireplace below, but on a smaller scale and without a painting. The chair rail, baseboard, and cornice are similar to those in the western parlor, but the punch-and-gouge work is absent.

The main staircase turns only once to reach the cross-hall upstairs. The front part of this hall has been partitioned to provide a third bedroom in the main portion. On the east side of the hallway, opposite the top flight of the staircase, are two steps that lead into another hallway that runs along the back of the east portion of the main house. At the end of this hallway, in the northeast corner of the main house, is a four-panel door leading to the attic and a doorway into the second floor of the rear ell. This unusual arrangement appears to have been part of the original floorplan.

The bedroom in front of this hallway, on the east end of the main house, contains a corner closet similar to the one in the stairhall below. The mantel shelf is embedded in plasterwork. There is no chair rail, and the cornice has been obliterated by a new ceiling. Otherwise, the moulding profiles repeat those found elsewhere in this section.

The frames of the openings into the rear wing also repeat the doorways of the main house, but there the similarity stops. In the wing, the detailing dates from the Victorian period. The confused plan of the upstairs rooms bears witness to an extensive remodelling; access to one room is attainable only through the closet in another. The chimney in this wing stands between the present dining room and kitchen.

The wing on the eastern end of the house is said to have been used by Nicholas Ridgely for holding Court of Chancery sessions. It was later used as a doctor's office. Two doors open outdoors, and one opens into the east room of the main house. Like the rear wing, its first floor is at ground level, whereas the main house is raised on a basement. A large fireplace in the east gable wall of this wing contains a simple mantle, the mouldings of which reflect those found in the main section. The other exposed woodwork features simple bead mouldings.

Above the main room of this wing is a second-floor room that can be reached only by its own staircase; it probably was a servant's lodging room, indicating that the wing could have been built as a kitchen originally.

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(7. Description, Continued 3)

Changes in this room are revealed by the several periods of architectural detailing that are present.

One of the present farm outbuildings is a brick barn. The texture of the bricks and the hewn beams used throughout indicate that this building is contemporary with the house. The barn is two stories high, with a basement that might have been used for storage. Legend states that the upper floor was once used as slave quarters, although the story has not been substantiated. A brick addition was built onto the east end of the barn, probably during the nineteenth century, and several more recent wings have been added to accommodate the needs of a modern dairy farm.

With its outbuildings and original setting, Somerville is one of the truly fine examples of federal rural architecture and detailing in Kent County.

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(8, Significance, Continued)

Gardner left his property to his three grandsons, the sons of his only daughter, Mary, and her husband James McMullan. The grandson of one of these heirs sold Ridgely the property in 1798. By a curious provision of the deed, the seller specified that the property would thereafter be known as Somerville.

From the time of his first biography, written but eight years after his death, writers have described Nicholas Ridgely as a man held in high esteem by all who knew him. A man with an uncommonly fine countenance and a strong, clear voice who "adhered strictly to the manners, customs and fashions of his youth," Ridgely was well informed on many subjects. However, it was in his knowledge of the law that he excelled.

The Ridgely family had long served the Lower Counties in the field of the law. Nicholas' grandfather, also named Nicholas, had served as county treasurer, clerk of the peace, prothonotary and register in chancery. For nine years, the elder Nicholas served on the supreme court. Dr. Charles Ridgely, the Chancellor's father, served in the colonial and state legislatures for twenty years, presided as a judge of Common Pleas and Quarter Sessions, and served in the convention that wrote the 1776 Delaware constitution.

Chancellor Nicholas Ridgely (1762-1830) received a background in politics and reached manhood during a politically stimulating era. After securing a liberal education, Nicholas spent more than four years studying law under Robert Goldsborough of Cambridge, Maryland. By the time he was 25, Nicholas was already recognized for his talents; he served as a Kent County delegate to the state convention that ratified the United States Constitution. For the next three years, he served in the Legislative Council, or upper house, and thus participated in the election of the first U. S. Senators and presidential electors.

In 1791, he became attorney general and a delegate to the state constitutional convention, which was to revise the Delaware government. He had the honor of being "perhaps the youngest man in the Convention" and became one of its most influential members.

While still serving as attorney-general, Ridgely was elected in 1792 to the General Assembly as a representative from Kent. Since this session was responsible for revising the code to conform to the new constitution, it is interesting to note that the key acts were introduced by young Nicholas Ridgely.

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(8, Significance, Continued, 2)

Upon Chancellor William Killen's resignation from the bench in 1801, Nicholas Ridgely was appointed his successor. At this time, the Chancellor was the sole judge of the Court of Chancery, which had been formed under the 1792 constitution. Legal scholars have considered Ridgely to be the founder of chancery court practice and principles in Delaware.

Nicholas Ridgely served as chancellor until his death, during the April term at Georgetown in 1830. He was survived by his wife, Mary Brereton Ridgely, to whom he was married in 1806. Upon her death, his estate passed to his nephew, Henry Moore Ridgely. The widow continued to live at Eden Hill, near Dover, where they had moved in 1810, but she did not dispose of Somerville until 1846.

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| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
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| | |

(Number all entries)

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(9, Major Bibliographical References, Continued)

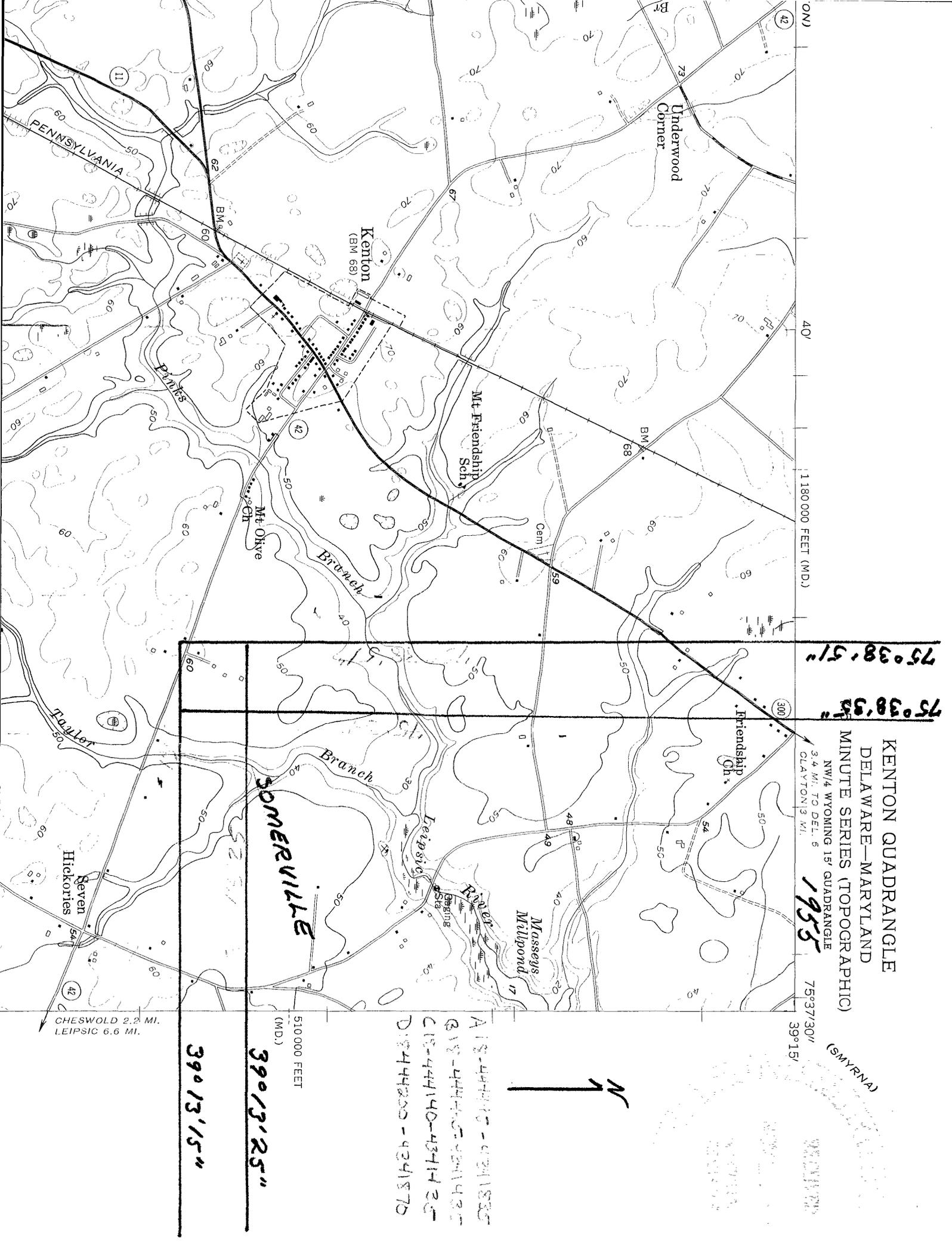
McCarter, J. M., and B. F. Jackson. Historical and Biographical History of the State of Delaware. 1882

Biographical and Genealogical History of the State of Delaware. Philadelphia, 1899

Scharf, J. Thomas. History of Delaware, 1609-1888. Philadelphia, 1888.

Dictionary of American Biography, vol. XV. New York, 1943.





75°38'51" W
75°38'51" W

KENTON QUADRANGLE
DELAWARE—MARYLAND
MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
NW/4 WYOMING 15' QUADRANGLE
3.4 MI. TO DEL. S
CLAYTON 13 MI. 1955

75°37'30" W
39°15' N (SMYRNA)

SOMERVILLE
510 000 FEET (M.D.)
39°13'25" N
39°13'15" N

A 18-44445-4241855
Q 18-44445-4241435
C 18-44440-4341425
D 18-44420-4341870

CHESWOLD 2.2 MI.
LEIPSIK 6.6 MI.

