

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
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K-1372

Property Name: James Williams House

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

The house and 240-acre farm are located on the south side of Route 42, half-way between the town of Kenton and the crossroads known as Seven Hickories. The nominated property is a portion of the entire farm that surrounds and includes the main house and its associated agricultural buildings. Their property extends northwest and southeast along Route 42 for 750 feet on either side of the driveway and extends southwest away from the road for 1,500 feet. This parcel contains 51.65 acres.

Owner: Harry Clifford Clark
Kenton, Delaware 19955

Description:

The James Williams House is a brick, 2-story, 5-bay, center-hall-plan building that was constructed in 1848. It employs the symmetrical floor plan that evolved during the eighteenth century and has Greek-Revival details that were current during the 1840's. An unusual feature of the house is the exterior bathroom attached to the second floor east gable end.

The house is laid in seven-course common bond brick. The brick on the facade is rubbed and laid with fine, narrow mortar joints. The windows on the front and rear of the house are six-over-six. The shutters are original. The front door is a panelled double door with applied naturalistic mouldings. Above the door is a long, three-light transom. The present 3-bay porch with chamfered posts and sawn decorative brackets dates to the 1880's and replaces an

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original 1-bay entrance porch. The scars left by the wood members of the original porch have been covered with decorative tile. The gable roof has a pair of dormer windows with Greek Revival details of rounded arch windows and complete classical pilasters. The box cornice of the main block has partial returns and details on both the front and rear and gable ends. The interior gable end chimneys had chimney pots added to them in the 1880's.

The rear wing was built at the same time as the main house and has a corbelled cornice. The porch on the west side of the wing has been screened in. The projecting bays on the east gable end and on the rear of the main block were added in the 1880's.

The outhouse associated with the building is most unusual period. It was constructed when the house was re-detailed in the 1880's; it is attached to the east side of the rear wing and is supported by classically detailed chamfered posts and trellis work. The roof is a concave, sloped, pyramidal roof.

On the interior, the first floor has a parlor on either side of the center stairhall. The rooms have elaborate marble mantels. One has decorative tiles which depict fairy tale scenes. The tiles were added in the 1880's.

The farm complex of agricultural outbuildings consist of three sheds, a chicken house, garage, a barn, and a granary. The chicken house and sheds are fairly modern buildings of frame and cinder block construction. The granary is a double pen structure with long, gable end facades and narrow depth. It has three major bays and a roofline that extends from between the two floors to the top of the loft. The barn has a gable end facade and is two stories high with a loft. Both the granary and the barn are constructed with mortise and tenon joints.

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Historic Background:

The house was built by John Williams in 1848. The description in the deeds for the property indicate that the house was standing and lately erected by John Williams before he died in 1849. It was part of a larger tract that came into the Williams family in 1846 when George Williams bought 171 acres from the Ridgely family as part of the settlement of Nicholas Ridgely's estate. Ridgely has owned this farm as part of a larger tract surrounding Somerville (K-234) which is directly across the street from the Williams House. The entire plantation on both sides of the road was originally part of the Partnership or Mill Range tract of 1800 acres deeded to John Richardson and Francis Whitewell in 1683. It was purchased by Robert French in 1703 and split by his granddaughter into two tracts in 1758. Mary French Gardner and her husband James received 59⁴ acres that includes the land under consideration. In 1798, Francis McMullan Gardner sold the tract to Nicholas Ridgely with the provision that it always be called Somerville. The land remained in the Williams family from 1846 to 1944.

While the land remained in the hands of James Williams from 1850 to 1899, it was employed as a model farm. Williams was a fairly wealthy man, as were all those who had owned the property before him. In 1860 and in 1870, his farm in Little Creek Hundred was one of the more prosperous recorded in the Census of Agriculture, being valued at \$10,000 in 1860 and \$20,000 in 1870. In both of those years he primarily grew corn with some wheat and also some dairy products. This was typical of most of the farmers in this area of Kent County.

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In the 1880 Census of Agriculture, Williams listed that in addition to his corn and wheat crops, he also had 4,000 peach trees. It is also recorded by the census taker that James Williams owned a one-acre vinyard. This is the only other vinyard in Kenton Hundred, besides the one that Thomas Bailey owned. Bailey was the only landowner with a wealthier farm than Williams. His 470 acres are worth \$30,000 as opposed to Williams' tract, worth \$20,000. The 1888 History of Delaware by Scharf claims that a brickyard was operated at the farm from 1840 to 1875 by James Williams. There is no documentary or physical evidence that this yard ever existed, except perhaps to produce the bricks needed for the house.

State of Significance:

The James Williams House is an outstanding combination of Greek-Revival and Federal style architecture, erected when both styles were being supplanted by other styles. In exhibiting this mix of style, coupled with the 1880's introduction of interior sanitary facilities, the facade porch and the use of decorative tiles. This house, unique in Kent County, is eligible under Criterion C. In erecting the house, John Williams was creating a mirror of Sumerville which was just across the street. Both display the 5-bay, center-hall symmetry associated with traditional Delaware buildings but both also display their owner individuality in their choice of decorative elements. Somerville has a Gothic Revival theme, while the Williams House is Greek-Revival.