

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **AUG 3 1987**

date entered **SEP 11 1987**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Governor Benjamin T. Biggs Farm

and/or common

2. Location

street & number County Road 435 (Choptank Road) NA not for publication

city, town Middletown vicinity of

state Delaware code 10 county New Castle code 002

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<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:

4. Owner of Property

name Val LaPorte

street & number 432 R.D.#1

city, town Middletown vicinity of state Delaware

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New Castle County Recorder of Deeds

street & number City/County Building, 800 French Street

city, town Wilmington state Delaware

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Delaware Cultural Resource Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1980 (Site #N-5123) federal state county local

depository for survey records Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
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 Governor Benjamin T. Biggs Farm is located in Pencader Hundred, south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, on the east side of Choptank Road (County Road 435), and .5 miles south of the junction of Choptank Road and Bethel Road (County Road 433).

The 1846 brick dwelling and seven late nineteenth century outbuildings are situated on a four acre parcel with the dwelling facing west towards the road. The house is set back approximately 300 feet from the road with an expansive lawn and a circular drive in front. South of the house is a long lane leading from the road which intersects the edge of the circle and continues into the farm yard. Within the circle drive is a large rock parenthesized by remnants of two semi-circular lines of boxwoods. This feature, perhaps once part of a more formal garden, was allegedly copied from Victor duPont's estate by John Biggs, son of Governor Biggs, who studied with duPont in the 1880's. As such, this portion of the garden is considered a contributing site. Altogether, the site contains eight contributing buildings and one contributing site.

The Governor Benjamin T. Biggs house is a two and one-half story, five bay, L-plan, gable roofed, brick dwelling with a one and one-half story, gable roofed wing extending from the south end of the east (rear) elevation. The exterior walls are brick--laid in stretcher bond on the facade, and laid in seven to one common bond on the other elevations and wing. The house foundation is also brick and it encloses a full basement. The gable roof is covered with raised seam metal and trimmed with a corbelled brick cornice. The gables have a flush verge finished with a verge board. Three interior chimneys, one on each gable end, service the hearths. Two dormers pierce the facade pitch. The dormers have segmental arched roofs trimmed with moulded and returned cornices. In the dormers are six over six double hung sash windows finished with segmental arched heads and moulded pilasters.

The fenestration is symmetrical with five over five bays and a center bay door. The door is paneled with two, vertical, recessed and moulded panels, and is trimmed with a plain timber surround, moulded head, a three light flat transom and a timber lintel. Six over six, double hung sash windows pierce the facade. These windows are finished with rounded timber sides, a timber lug sill and a timber lintel. Paneled shutters are on both the first and second stories, with daisy flower shutter dogs. The front porch is nonextant. Two modern porches were added to the side elevations of the wing. The north elevation porch is enclosed.

The Governor Benjamin T. Biggs house is a single pile dwelling with a center stair hall. The two flight, open string stair is rather plain with tapered, round balusters, and a round handrail ending in a curl on the newel post. The turned newel post is made of a fine grain wood and has a moulded cap and base. Other trim is equally unpretentious. The baseboard is simply moulded, and the windows are finished with plain, wide board surrounds, blank corner boxes and corbelled sills.

The most elaborate feature of the house is the parlor mantel. The mantel opening has a moulded surround and bulls-eye corner blocks. The bulls-eyes are recessed in the block rather than projecting. Two plain pilasters support two smaller pilasters which curve in toward each other and support a shelf. The shelf has wide bed moulding which

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input 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 checked="" 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates	1846	Builder/Architect	Unknown
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Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Governor Benjamin T. Biggs Agricultural Complex is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, B, and C--historic events; association with an important person from our past; and architectural significance as a good example of regional architecture. This site is a stellar example of the rebuilding phenomenon which occurred in southern New Castle County throughout most of the nineteenth century. This complex is also associated with the 48th governor of Delaware, Benjamin Thomas Biggs, a democrat who held office from 1887 to 1891. Governor Biggs not only held state and national political offices (Congressman, 1868 to 1872), but he was also a wealthy farmer who participated in the agricultural reforms of his day, and a businessman who was involved in finance and industry. The dwelling is a good example and representative of the vernacular Greek Revival style popular in this rebuilding period (1840 to 1880). The house is in excellent condition and has experienced few changes to compromise its integrity. The outbuildings are arranged in a typical courtyard fashion representative of late nineteenth century farm plans.

The Governor Benjamin T. Biggs Agricultural Complex can best be understood in the context of major societal changes--agricultural reform, social change, and architectural renewal, that occurred in southern New Castle County in the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century.

The B. T. Biggs complex is located in an agricultural area known for its flat terrain and rich soil. It is adjacent to, and shares the same characteristics, as the "Levels," an area known historically, and presently, as having some of the best farmland on the east coast. The soil type, Matapeake-Sassafras association, found in portions of Pencader, Appoquinimink and St. Georges Hundreds, is considered one of the finest soils for farming in terms of friability and fertility, and demarcates this area as the most productive in the state. The terrain and soil have historically enabled farmers to grow grain crops, especially wheat, in great abundance. Throughout the eighteenth century, farmers from this area supplied the reknowned Brandywine Mills, near Wilmington, with wheat. Butter was also produced in commercial quantities and was a cash crop along with wheat. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, due to poor farming practices, even these rich soils were exhausted.

One of the nation's first Agricultural Societies was formed in New Castle County in 1804 by farmers alarmed by the depressed state of agriculture. The society's goals were to encourage the farmer to practice scientific farming. An equally important tenet of the reformers in southern New Castle County was the reconsolidation of farmland. During this period of poor harvests, depressed land values and depopulation, wealthier landowners were able to acquire substantial amounts of land. The acquisition of land altered the character of farming and the social relationships between farm worker and landowner. Agriculture as business was to emerge from the ashes of this agrarian depression.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 4 acres

Quadrangle name St. Georges, DE

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	4	3	5	8	6	0	4	3	7	4	0	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C

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D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the nominated property coincides with the legal parcel as indicated on the attached sketch map, which is referenced: New Castle County Property Tax Map, 1985, parcel number 11-061.00-012.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state NA code NA county NA code NA

state NA code NA county NA code NA

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Hubert F. Jicha, III, Assistant Historic Preservation Planner

organization New Castle County Department of Planning date December 1986

street & number 2701 Capitol Trail telephone (302) 366-7780

city or town Newark 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title John R. Kern Director, DE Div. of Hist. & Cult Aff. date 7/22/1987

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

date 9/11/87

Patrick Adams
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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continues around the heads of the small pilasters. The face of the mantel frieze is a trapezoidal, flat panel surrounded by three pieces of flat moulding assembled in a stepped fashion so as to create a recessed panel effect.

The mantel in the south room has similar pilasters but lacks the moulding and frieze panel. Second floor mantels consist of a rectangular opening framed by plain pilasters, a plain frieze, and a corbelled cornice. Consoles emanate from the pilasters and support the mantel shelf.

The second story has three rooms. Two bed chambers echo the first floor arrangement. The second flight of stairs leads into a smaller third room on the west side (front) of the house. The original use of this room is unclear, however, late nineteenth century clothes hooks are extant. Over the first flight of stairs is a single, closed flight of stairs leading to the attic. The attic is finished with plaster walls, and is lit by dormer windows.

The wing is one and one-half stories high and has a low gable roof. Allegedly, the gable roof was originally a flounder, or single pitch roof. The first story is a kitchen with a large gable end hearth which formerly housed a crane. Beside the hearth on one side is a built-in cupboard made with beaded tongue and groove boards, and on the other side is a box corner stair which ascends to the second floor. The center passage of the main block leads into the kitchen. There is no communication between the house and wing second story chambers. Another corner stair in the second story chamber leads to the garret, where some alterations can be seen, and the use of wire nails may indicate some basis for an original flounder roof.

Associated with the dwelling are seven outbuildings. Although presently arranged in a squarish configuration, some of these buildings have been moved and it is unlikely that this is the original farm plan. However, in form and fabric, these buildings contribute to the overall integrity and significance of the site. Between 1980 and 1986, a large, braced frame hay barn was demolished.

East of the dwelling, near the wing, is a late nineteenth century frame smokehouse constructed with nailed posts and rails. The gable roof is covered with corrugated metal, and the walls are sided with board and batten.

East of the smokehouse is a range of three buildings aligned in a west-to-east direction. The westernmost building is a late nineteenth century implement shed now used as a garage. It is of frame construction on a one-half wall of concrete block, and it has a shed-gable roof. This implement shed is attached to a small, two bay barn with an added lean-to.

Possibly contemporary with the house, the barn is braced frame with hewn principal timbers and vertical sawn secondary timbers. Second story joists are face hewn log, and the end girts double as joists. The gable roof has common rafters pinned at the apex. A half wall of concrete block has replaced earlier deteriorated framing.

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The third building in the range is a late nineteenth century implement shed which is attached to the lean-to on the east side of the barn. This implement shed is four bays long, and has earthfast cedar posts with nailed secondary timbers. The roof is shed-gable, and the entire front elevation is open.

Directly across from this range of buildings, on the other side of the lane, is a tall, narrow building of an undetermined category, probably built late in the nineteenth century. Presently, it is used as shop. It is a one and one-half story, high gable roofed, braced frame building, constructed with circular sawn timbers, and sided with both vertical boards and board and batten. A louvered cupola with a weather vane caps the roof.

The building farthest east is an implement shed with an attached dairy. The dairy was moved from near the house in the early 1980's and dates from the late nineteenth century. The dairy is a gable roofed, frame building with a beaded tongue and groove board interior, vertical board siding, and a corrugated metal roof. The implement shed was constructed with earthfast cedar posts, a shed-gable roof, and an open long elevation, as was typical of late nineteenth century implement sheds. In the early twentieth century, the long elevation was closed, the cedar posts were severed and the building was converted into a cow shed. Presently, this former implement shed is being used as a horse stable.

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Farmers developed the business side of agriculture by keeping records of virtually every aspect of the farm and determining the cost effectiveness of each factor. Slavery was discontinued late in the eighteenth century because day labor was deemed more economical and efficient. Owner and worker relationships were formalized through contractual agreements. Portions of consolidated land holdings were run as individual farms by farm managers on a crop share basis. The houses built for the managers were comparable in form and finish to the landowner's dwellings although less ostentatious. The construction of these managers' homes represents one aspect of the rebuilding phenomenon. Tenant farming was often somewhat centralized with farm machinery taken from farm to farm instead of each tenant having his own. With the advent of horse-drawn machinery, landowners were able to invest heavily in order to better engage in capital intensive grain farming where equipment and speed were needed to plant and harvest in a short period of time. The same advantages were afforded to farmers in the mid-west who flooded the wheat market after the Civil War. During this period, Delaware farmers began cultivating peaches as a cash crop for export to the large eastern cities.

Peaches were grown in Delaware during the eighteenth century primarily for distillation into brandy. Peach trees were first planted to bear market crops in 1832 near Delaware City, and were planted throughout central and southern Delaware from 1850 to 1900. The extension of the railroad and the invention of the "arctic" car enabled orchardists to plant prodigious numbers of trees and be relatively assured of prompt delivery to the big cities. Land values soared, sometimes doubling, between 1850 and 1870. Peach culture declined rather quickly in north central Delaware due to a glutted market and the natural 20-year life span of the peach tree. The greatest factor in the decline was the onset of the "Peach Yellows," a blight which destroyed the fruit and eventually killed the tree.

As greater numbers of trees were planted in southern Delaware and adjacent lands in Maryland, farmers in the north central hundreds returned to the traditional grain and butter cash crops. Some wealthy farmers acquired property in Maryland to continue peach cultivation. The prosperity of this era has led to a local tradition of calling large farm dwellings "Peach houses." These buildings should be more appropriately called "Wheat houses," since it was principally the cultivation of that crop which enabled the farmers to erect such structures.

The dwellings that survive today in the Pencader, Appoquinimink and St. Georges Hundreds were the homes of the wealthy who redefined the architectural landscape even as they redefined farming practices and social relationships. Prior to 1820, houses were constructed on a hall-parlor plan with outbuildings for domestic service functions. The nascent renewal began with the remodeling of older homes in the 1820's and 1830's. The architectural style which emerged featured an unheated center stair passage, and combined Gothic, Italianate and Greek Revival styles expressed in a rather subdued manner. Domestic functions, formerly relegated to outbuildings, were incorporated into the dwelling in the form of a service wing, lending to the building an L-configuration.

B. T. Biggs' father, John Biggs, lived in a log house (N-6230) facing Bethel Church Road northeast of the nominated site. In 1846, John Biggs built the ell-plan brick

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house which was conveyed to Benjamin in 1861. An identical brick house was built on the adjacent farm to the north for or by Benjamin's brother, Sewell C. Biggs. The log house passed out of the family's hands sometime before 1868. By 1893 (as listed on Baist Atlas), Sewell Biggs had acquired two other farms on Bethel Road, augmenting the family farm with tenant farms.

Benjamin Thomas Biggs seems to have done well at whatever he put his hand. Born in 1821, Benjamin was educated at private schools, Penington Seminary in New Jersey, and Wesleyan University at Middletown, Connecticut. At 25, he was commissioned a major of the Delaware Regiment created for the Mexican War. In 1852 (at 31), he was elected to the convention to amend the State Constitution. In 1860, he was defeated in a bid for a Congressional seat on the Democratic ticket, however in 1868 he was elected and in 1870 returned to that office. During this same period, Benjamin Biggs was elected a director in the Citizens National Bank of Middletown, and elected a director, and then president of the Queen Anne's and Kent Railroad which was extended into Maryland. In 1887, Benjamin and his sons owned 67,000 peach trees in Queen Anne's and Kent Counties, Maryland, where he was able to make a healthy profit on his crop. Scharf, in his late nineteenth century history of Delaware, states that profits were gained "by the advantages afforded by the Queen Anne's and Kent Railroad." In 1887, Benjamin Thomas Biggs was elected governor of Delaware.

As Governor, Benjamin Biggs advocated a state constitutional amendment to give a greater share of votes to Wilmington and northern Delaware in legislature. He also supported the construction of a state prison and insane asylum (Delaware State Hospital, 1889). Legislation passed during his tenure includes: a law making husbands support wives and children; and authorization of a referendum for a constitutional amendment.

The political climate in Delaware during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was particularly bleak. In 1886, the "American Magazine" referred to Delaware as being in "the mediæval period of politics." The 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution were not ratified by Delaware until 1911. Democrats were virtually assured election for the last quarter of the nineteenth century due to legalistic manipulations of the tax rolls regarding delinquent tax payers, in particular black Republicans.

Level of Significance

The Governor Benjamin T. Biggs site is significant as an example of the mid-nineteenth century rebuilding period of north central Delaware. The site is lent more significance as the home of Governor Biggs, who, like his neighbors, participated in all aspects of society: agriculture; business and politics. Because of its association with Governor Biggs, state significance is being claimed for this site.

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Historic Context

The Governor Biggs Farm is located in the upper Peninsula zone of Delaware. The dwelling was erected during a period of increased industrialization in manufacturing and increased capitalization of business, transportation and agriculture. The 1830 - 1880 period was a time when agriculture in Delaware became more of a business operation and less of a family occupation. This was especially true of wealthy farmers such as Biggs.

The 1880 - 1940 time period in Delaware was characterized by increased growth of all of the towns and cities in the state. Both the cities and the new suburbs increased in population. This growth created new demand on the Delaware farmers to supply the cities in Delaware as well as the mid-Atlantic region with food. It was during this period that a majority of the outbuildings were constructed and when the landscaped garden site was developed.

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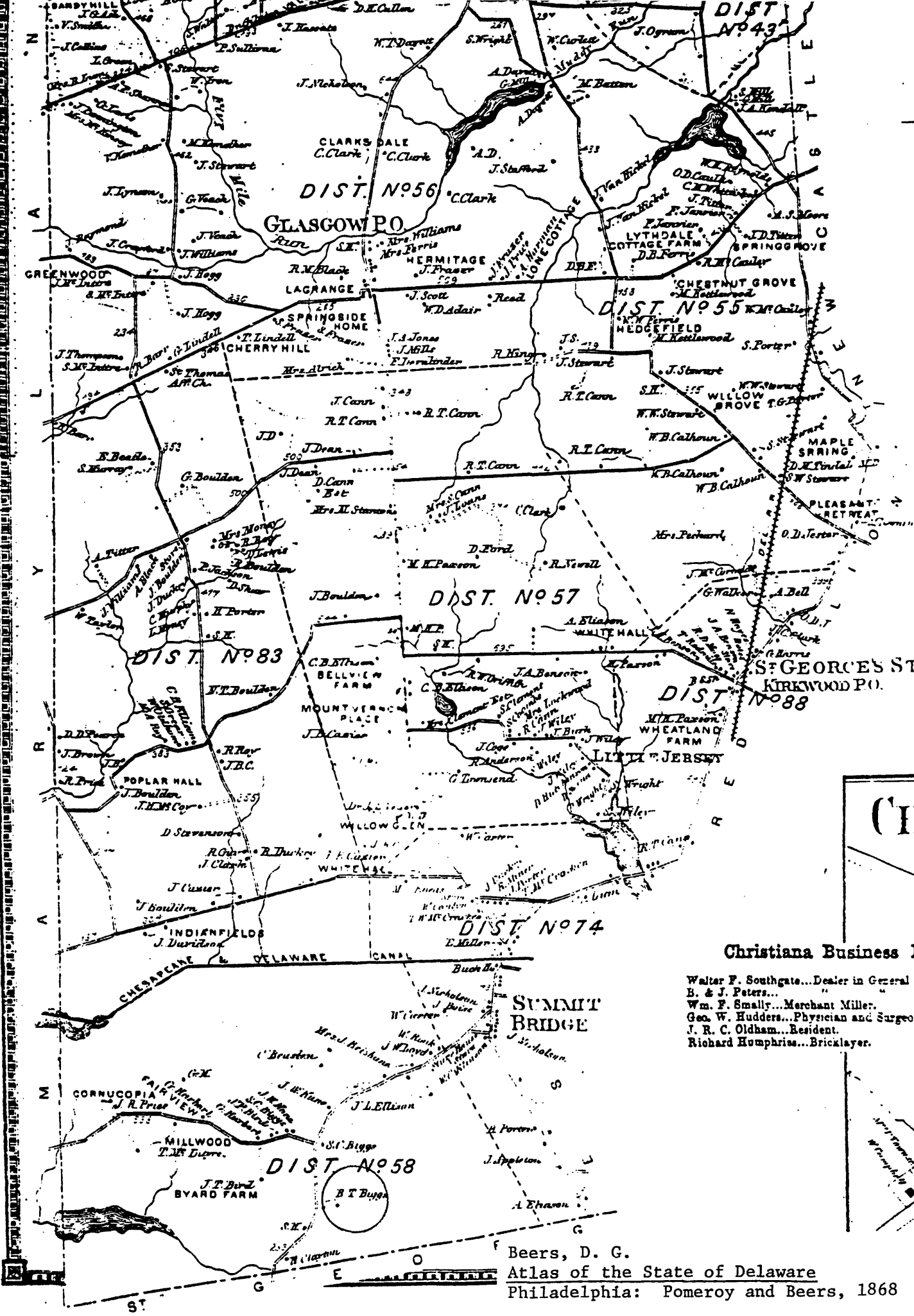
Governor Benjamin T. Biggs Farm (N-5123)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register
Criteria.



Rita Justice
County Executive
New Castle County, Delaware

2-10-87
Date

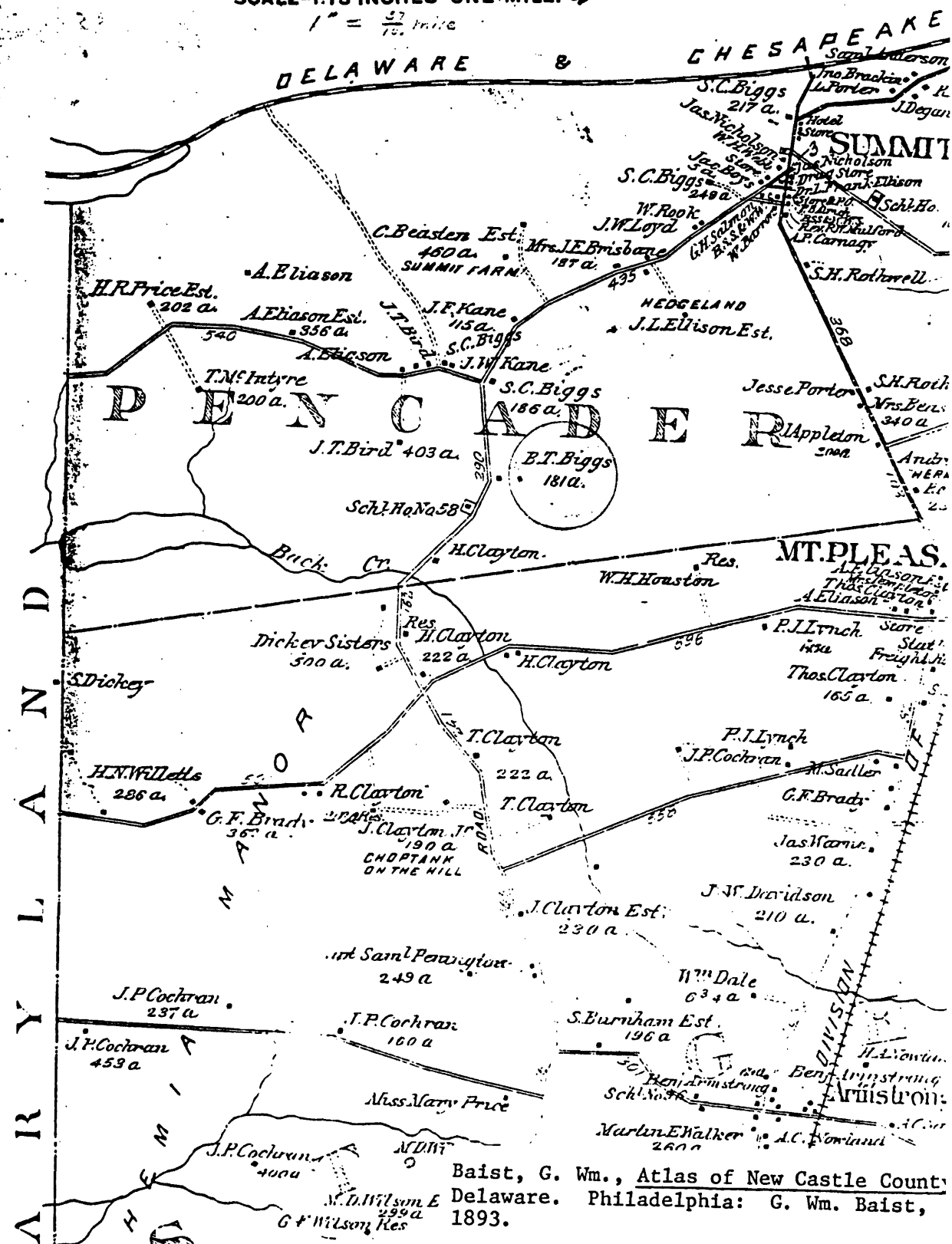


Christiana Business

- Walter F. Southgate... Dealer in General
- B. & J. Peters...
- Wm. F. Smally... Merchant Miller.
- Geo. W. Hudders... Physician and Surgeon
- J. R. C. Oldham... Resident.
- Richard Humphries... Bricklayer.

ATLAS OF
 PUBLISHED BY G.W. BAIST
NEWCASTLE COUNTY
 DELAWARE

SCALE—1.75 INCHES—ONE MILE.
 1" = $\frac{57}{10}$ mile



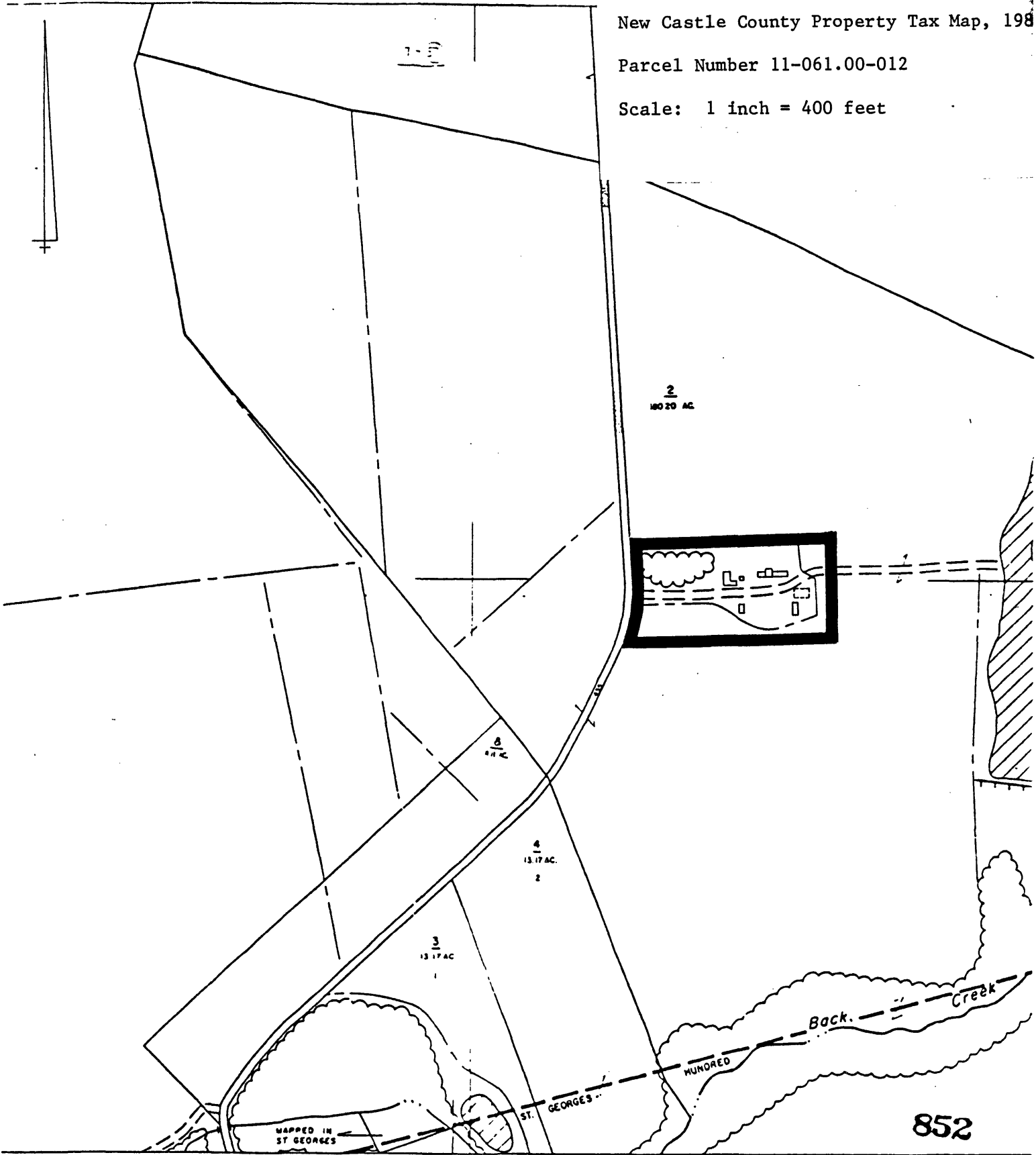
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Gov. B.T. Biggs House (N-5123)

New Castle County Property Tax Map, 198

Parcel Number 11-061.00-012

Scale: 1 inch = 400 feet



CEMETERY
 CHURCH
 SCHOOL
 WOODED AREA
 FENCE
 MARSH
 BEACH MARK
 BLOCK/SECTION

——— PARCEL OUTLINE
 - - - - - INTERIOR PARCEL LINE
 ——— PARCEL HOOK
 2 PARCEL NUMBER
 130 AC. TOTAL ASSESSED ACREAGE
 125 AC. TOTAL CALCULATED ACREAGE
 ST- PARCEL & CONTROL MAP NO.
 SUBDIVISION MAP NO.



REVISIONS		
1 7-5-76	6	11
2 DEC 20, 1977	7	12
3 1-2-78	8	13
4 1-24-81	9	14
5 5-2-81	10	15

PROPERTY MAP	
NEW CASTLE COUNTY, DELAWARE	
HUNDRED: PENCADER	
SCALE: 1" = 200'	MAP NO. 702
DATE OF FLYING: 09-80	61
DATE COMPILED: MAR, 70	
GRID SYSTEM: DELAWARE STATE PLANE COORDINATE SYSTEM	