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

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms

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The Historic Resources of Kenton Hundred consist of 29 individual properties spread throughout the hundred and one historic district with 29 properties in the town of Kenton. Four of the individual properties are already on the National Register. The nominated properties constitute a comprehensive collection of standing structure that illustrate the hundred's role as a prime agricultural region from its period of early development in the first half of the eighteenth-century to its maturation as a well settled and stable farm area by the end of the nineteenth-century. The Kenton Historic District illustrates the growth of a small secondary economic center that served the immediate needs of the surrounding population.

Kenton Hundred is located in the northwest corner of Kent County. It is bounded by New Castle County on the north and on the east by Duck Creek and Little Creek Hundred. East and West Dover Hundreds are to the south while Maryland's Kent and Queen Anne's counties are to the west. The land is relatively flat and well watered. The major drainage system is the Duck Creek and its various branches along with the Fork Branch of St. Jones Creek. Most of the land is farmland and the population is primarily rural. There is only one municipal area totally within the hundred, the town of Kenton. Both Clayton and Cheswold are located partially in Kenton and partially in either Duck Creek or Little Creek. In 1980, the population of the hundred was 3700. In addition to the open farmland, there are also large concentration of wooded land including 1,750 acres of woodland in the Blackistor Wildlife Area.

Transportation has always been important to the hundred. The main north-south highway in Delaware, Route 13, passes just to the east of the hundred. The main north-south rail line is actually the eastern border of the hundred. Another rail line leaves the main line at Clayton and passes thorugh the town of Kenton on its way to Easton, Maryland. Three main roads cross the hundred and are important transportation routes just as they were in the eighteenth-century. Route 6 is the road from Smyrna or Duck Creek to Chestertown, Maryland. Route 42 is the Old Dover Road that passed through Blackiston Cross Roads and Kenton as it passes through southwestern New Castle County as it goes to the Sassafras River area of Maryland. Route 300 is the road from Smyrna to Centreville, Maryland. Most of the nominated properties are along these three highways.

Kenton Hundred was created by an act of the Delaware Legislature in 1869 from the western portions of Duck Creek Hundred and Little Creek Hundred. It was first settled in the early eighteenth-century by English colonists. However land grants were made as early as 1683. At this time, Delaware was part of William Penn's proprietership and his agents were responsible for land sales. Among the early land grants were "Hillyard's Exchange" and "the Manor of Freith." There were large tracts of land that would eventually be split up after about 1710. These early land grants were primarily speculative ventures on the part of various individuals. One group of merchants purchased a large plot of land in the hundred in 1714. The Bristol Naval Store Company

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Company purchased 3125 acres in order to plant and cultivate hemp for sale to the British Navy and various shipbuilding concerns. This venture did not last long and their agent purchased the land for his own use as a speculative venture.

Some land grants in Kenton Hundred were also made through the State of Maryland. The exact border between the two states was not defined and agreed to until 1765. The Blackiston family tract "Deer Park" (K-1320) was granted to them by Lord Baltimore of Maryland in 1733. Benjamin Blackiston split up the 2255 acre tract in his will in 1758 among his children.

The process of subdividing the large grants continued throughout the eighteenth-century. Sometimes this took place through a will at the death of a large land holder and other times by outright sale. This process was reversed in the nineteenth-century. Beginning in the second quarter of that century, a few individuals began to acquire large tracts of land. Most were buying farms scattered throughout the Hundred and out of it as well, while others acquired adjoining farmland. Some of the new owners such as Philip Lewis were buying land for speculative purposes while others such as Thomas Attix, Thomas Lamb, and Nathaniel Wilds, were buying land for agricultural purposes.

During the eighteenth-century much of Kenton Hundred was forest land. Most of the surviving early deeds make reference to the "Forest of Duck Creek" in the land description. The first settlers cleared the land and began planting some food crops but they were planting tobacco as their cash crop. Tobacco quickly lost its appeal though as prices declined and Kenton Hundred farmers shifted to corn and wheat as their primary crops. Wheat and corn provided the economic base on which most of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century farms were built. As the nineteenth-century progressed, there was a gradual shift to corn as the predominant crop and wheat being a secondary one. The main reason for the shift was an interest in dairy production. The Census of Agriculture during the nineteenth century indicates that dairy products, mostly butter, was also a major cash crop. The corn that was grown would be intended as a feed crop for cattle. Most of the wheat that was produced was processed locally in grist mills located the along the smaller creeks in the Hundred. flour was shipped to market through Smyrna which was the principal transportation center for the area. Some farm products would also be shipped to market through Chestertown but the orientation for most Kenton Hundred residents was to the east.

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It is commonly believed that the prosperity that started the rebuilding of much of Delaware was caused by the introduction of peach cultivation. However in Kenton, at least, peaches did not become an important feature until after 1870. Prior to that time, peaches were an orchard crop that was grown for local consumption on the farm. No individual reports any type of peach orchard in Kenton Hundred until the Census of Agriculture that was taken in 1880. For the first time, peach orchards are recorded and when they occur they are massive. The usual pattern seems to be for a farmer to ignore the traditional grain and dairy crops and invest heavily in peaches. It is not unusual for a single farm owner to have 2,000 or 3,000 peach trees. The larger landowners would typically have 4,000 trees with the largest orchard being owned by George Arnold. He had 5,900 trees on a farm (K-1369) just south of Kenton. When the peach industry was destroyed by the "yellows", the farmers in Kenton Hundred were able to return to grain crops and dairy farming without too much difficulty. The major crop now are soybeans and corn, with dairy farming still a major activity.

The Hundred appears to have been a fairly prosperous region during its history. Census figures are not readily available for the Hundred as it was part of two other hundreds until 1869. However, the population for Duck Creek and for Little Creek Hundreds did not change greatly from census to census. With two exceptions, the increase for each hundred was about 200 to 300 people every ten years. The exceptions were a large jump in population, especially in Duck Creek from 1850 to 1860 and a slight drop in population from 1820 to 1830. The drop was the result of poor harvests and the opening of western lands while the increase was the result of increasingly better harvests and the building of the railroad down the Delmarva Peninsula. The first census that contain figures for Kenton Hundred is 1870. The increase from 1870 till the present continue at the rate of just a few hundred every ten years.

Until the end of the eighteenth-century, the regional centers were Smyrna, Dover and Millington Maryland. Kenton was not established as a small commercial center until the end of the eighteenth-century. Blackiston Crossroads which was further north of Kenton on Route 42 at Route 6 also was developed at this time but it never achieved the size of Kenton. In 1880 it had a population of 50 people. Downs Chapel was another crossroads community in Kenton Hundred. Established in 1838, it is located southwest of Kenton on Route 300. It main structures were a school and chapel. In 1880 it had 45 people. Another small town in the Hundred was Brenford which began as a railroad stop about 1866. By 1880, it had a population of 60. Clayton was another railroad town and it developed into a large population center next to Smyrna. It sets astride the main north side rail line and also served as a junction for lines running southwest and northwest. Begun about 1859, by 1880 it had a population of 400 people. Cheswhold, which like Clayton is only partially in Kenton Hundred, was another railroad town. Begun about 1856, the town grew rapidly and in 1880 had 200 residents.

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While the advent of the automobile during the second quarter of the twentieth-century, the smaller crossroad towns lost importance. One by one their stores fell into ruin and were torn down. The only structures remaining at Downs Chapel and Blackiston Crossroads are a few houses, church, small modern retail stores, such as convenience stores and liquor outlets. Nothing remains at Brenford except a couple of houses. Shopping is now done almost exclusively in Dover or Smyrna.

The architecture in the Hundred represents a wide range of structures that date from the mid-eighteenth-century till the end of the nineteenth-century. During those 150 years the building styles and construction techniques changed from assymmetrical floor plans and heavy timber-framed dwellings to symmetrical floor plans and light balloon frame structures. Logs were also a viable alternative during the early years of settlement in the Hundred but none have survived the ravages of time and man. The Poinsett house (K-1315) is the only building left in the Hundred that has any logs at all in its walls. Originally built as a one room plan brick dwelling, it was enlarged when the Blackiston family sold it in the early nineteenth-century with the addition of log additions to its west gable end.

The majority of the properties included in this nomination are rural farms except for four structures located in the Town of Kenton but not included in the historic district. Of the nomination properties, 16 are brick and the rest are frame with brick foundation. The early structures such as the Blackiston House (K-1320), the Gootee House (K-1333), are similar to domestic structures in the Chesapeake Bay area. In fact many early residents were originally from that region.

Considering the complexity of the architectural changes that took place in the Hundred, it is best to consider the built environment in terms of the evolution of floor plan and the arrangement of interior space. When the first settlers came into the Hundred, their options as to building type were limited basically to hall-parlor-plans (T. Lamb House, K-1635), Penn Plan (Blackiston House, K-1320) or a one room plan house (Poinsett House, K-1315). The hall-parlor-plan was the most popular in the area. As the eighteenth-century progressed new ideas about symmetry and design began to reflect the construction of domestic buildings in the Hundred. The Davis House (K-1323) built towards the end of the century and the Denny House (K-1374) both represent the influence of the Georgian ideals in architecture. Both have balanced facades with slight classical details. The interior space has been rearranged so that there is more private space in the dwelling with separate entrance halls and parlors on either side of the house in which domestic and social activities could be carried out.

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As notions of privacy and spacial arrangements developed, there was also a shift in the placement of additions and outbuildings. During much of the eighteenth-century, when additional space was needed in a dwelling, a wing was added to the gable end. Among others, the Hoffecker-Lockwood House (K-183) and the Blackiston House (K-1320) have wings added to the gable ends. This practice was changed in the nineteenth-century when additional space was created by the addition of wings on the rear of the house. The Arnold House (K-1369) and the Stevens House (K-1366), both built in the second quarter of the nineteenth-century, have rear wings that contain space for service functions. The rear wing at the Stevens House was actually the original dwelling but was shifted to use as a wing when the main block was built.

Of course the change did not happen at a single moment in time but rather was spread out over a long period. The Burrows House (K-1350) was built about 1830 with a full 2-story portion of the main block as a slightly lower section that were both built at the same time. The builder was maintaining the tradition of placing the service wing on the gable end and making it an obviously different part of the same house. The Downs House (K-1636) was enlarged in the same manner.

The acceptance of the use of a rear wing rather than a gable wing was hastened by the return of economic prosperity around 1850. New construction after that time almost always had a series of formal public rooms on the front of the first floor with service activities and sleeping space kept away from the public areas. The new prosperity of the 1850's also encouraged landowners to seek to place their own identity on their homes. Decorative elements such as brackets, classically inspired doorways and cross gables were commonly added to the houses either built new or on houses remodeled by their owners.

The last change in building layout occurred in the 1870's and 1880's as Queen Anne architecture became popular. The popular acceptance of Queen Anne design can be seen most readily in the use of decorative elements. The style was most commonly an urban form and it is not employed at all in rural Kenton Hundred except for the use of the Queen Anne philosphy of combining decorative details from divergent building styles. Only the Attix House (K-1303) which has a projecting bay on the east gable end shows any concession to the new styles. Within the town of Kenton, Queen Ann was very popular and there are a number of houses that were built using the assymmetrical floor plan that characterizes the style. Apparently the residents and builders in Kenton were more adventurous when it came to building houses.

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This nomination is the result of a comprehensive survey conducted by seasonal employees of the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Places. The survey recorded all structures within Kenton Hundred that were built before 1945. The recordation process includes completing survey forms that list all of the important features of a structure and its related outbuildings. A rough sketch of the floor plan and the layout of related buildings is included with the survey. Photographs are taken of every standing structure on the property. Each property is assigned a unique cultural resource survey (CRS) number with the letter prefix indicating the county. Kent County properties are recorded as K-000. The completed forms, photographs and negatives are stored in the offices of the Bureau of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. The properties being nominated from the over 220 surveyed structures were chosen according to the guidelines established by the National Register of Historic Places.

The Historic Resources of Kenton Hundred is presently a collection of significant standing structures. The archaeological component will be submitted for nomination after proper evaluation and testing has been conducted. These nominated properties include all of the eligible standing resurces in the hundred. Those properties not nominated either were not eligible under criterion A or B or, while once eligible under criterion C, have been so altered that they no longer convey a sense of the past or they no longer have the integrity of style and building material needed for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

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HISTORIC RESOURCES OF KENTON HUNDRED

Individual Properties Already On The National Register

Aspendale K-102

Site of Cheyney Clows Rebellion K-140

Enoch Jones House "Boxwood" K-138

Somerville K-234

National Register Properties Within Kenton Historic District

Wilds-Cooper House K-142 (K-4982.2)

Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 X 1700–1799 X 1800–1899 X 1900–	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric archeology-historicX agricultureX architecture art commerce communications	community planning conservation economics education engineering exploration/settlement	landscape architecture law literature military music philosophy politics/government	e religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1700-1933	Builder/Architect		omer (opeony)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Historic Resources of Kenton Hundred are a highly diverse collection of properties that serve to illustrate the growth and development of much of rural Delaware, from the early-eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century. pattern of agricultural use and change and the influence of the various transportation routes through the hundred make the nomination eligible under Criterion A. The significant grouping of structures, distributed throughout the two hundred years, convey a sense of the past and include examples from every period. Therefore, the nomination is also eligible under Criterion C.

Kenton Hundred began to be settled almost as soon as William Penn was awarded the colony of Pennsylvania which, at that time, included the three lower counties that make up present-day Delaware. Beginning in the 1680's, settlers were attracted to the forest land and rich soil of Kenton Hundred which at that time was part of Duck Creek and Little Creek Hundred. The process of occupying the land began immediately but not in earnest until the end of the second quarter of the eighteenth century, when a road network was properly laid out and a small trading settlement was established where present-day Smyrna is located. The original owners came from two directions. Many came from the south and west and had originally been residents of the Maryland colony. Still others were from the north and were coming down the peninsula in search of good inexpensive land.

The two earliest roads in the hundred are Route 6, which was the Smyrna-Millington-Chestertown Road, and Route 300, which was the Smyrna-Kenton-Centreville Road. The oldest houses in the hundred are located near the Smyrna-Millington Road and include such dwellings as the Blackiston House (K-1320), 1760; the Poinsett House (K-1315), 1765; Lamb's "Brick House Farm" (K-1635), 1750; and the Hoffecker-Lockwood House (K-183), 1760. Another important early transportation route is Route 42. This is commonly called the Dover-Kenton Road, but it connects the town of Kenton with Blackiston Crossroads and proceeds northwest to the Sassafras River in Maryland.

Those who first came to farm the hundred arrived with a ready knowledge of the best types of farmland to purchase. All of the eighteenth-century farm complexes, and most of the nineteenth-century ones as well, are located on well-drained soil with the house placed on the highest point of land on the farm or plantation. Also, the soil types represented on the early farms were those best suited for growing grain crops. Tobacco was most likely the first crop grown in Kenton Hundred, but it was quickly replaced by wheat and corn as the principal crops. By the middle of the eighteenth century, most farmers were exclusively planting grain crops. Estate inventories only rarely mention tobacco after about 1750. Thus, the farmers in Kenton Hundred were participating in a general shift to grain crops that characterized the northern Delmarva Peninsula and southeast Pennsylvania, as that region became the major wheat exporting region in America.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographic	al Data			
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see individual properties	-			
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state	code	county		code
11. Form Prepa	red Bv			
				
name/title Stephen G. Del So	rdo, Historian	n		
organization Bureau of Arch. &	Hist. Preserv	vation c	late March, 1983	
street & number Old State Hou	se, The Green	t	elephone 302-736	- 5685
city or town Dover		s	state DE	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
12. State Histo	ric Prese	rvation	Officer Co	ertification
The evaluated significance of this p	operty within the s	tate is:		
national	state _	<u>X</u> local		
As the designated State Historic Pre 665), I hereby nominate this property according to the criteria and proced	y for inclusion in th	e National Registe	r and certify that it ha	
State Historic Preservation Officer s	ignature	inie K.	Xtoffele	<u> </u>
title Deputy State Historic F	reservation Of	fficer	date	Conif 27 1985
For NPS use only I hereby certify that this prope	rty is included in the	e National Register + " fact Occ	lings date	
Keeper of the National Register		1		
Attest:			date	
Chief of Registration			uais	

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Wheat, corn and dairy products would be the principal cash crops during the nineteenth century. An economic down turn from the late 1820s to the 1840s enabled a number of wealthy individuals to purchase inexpensive land as less prosperous farmers left the land for new lands in the western states or turned to other occupations. When the economic recovery came, these few wealthy individuals were in a position to benefit from raising prosperity by increasing their holdings still further or by rebuilding their home sites. After 1870, the landowners briefly tried their hands at peach production, but a blight quickly destroyed that crop. While the peach boom was active, many Kenton Hundred farmers devoted almost half of their tillable land to peach orchards. There are no standing remains left of the extensive orchards. As the crop was destroyed, the trees were pulled out of the ground and burned. The loss of income from peaches effected growers for a few years, but prosperity was restored by the reintroduction of grain crops and dairy farming.

The architecture found in the hundred is basically vernacular in form, but it is strongly influenced by changes in design and in spacial arrangement over time. The biggest change in the housing stock was the shift to the use of symmetrical floor plans and the incorporation of service activities into rear wings of each house. The rear wing replaced separate buildings such as summer kitchens. The introduction and use of formal public rooms on the main floor caused a shift to the use of the second floor as the prime sleeping space. This also caused a resultant shift in the relationship between servants and farmhands and the landowners. While most Kenton Hundred households were not large enough to warrant large household staffs, the wealthier families would have had a few. Over time, the space allocated to them would diminish as they were relegated to less desirable space.

Architecture in Kenton Hundred and in most of Delaware is fairly conservative and not given to wide shifts. The early houses are the result of shared ideas on the part of the early builders as to the form and materials that, placed together, made a proper house. The hall-parlor-plan was the most popular plan in the hundred, but it was quickly superseded by the Georgian plan, with a separate center hall and formal public areas on either side. After the acceptance of the Georgian plan, major changes in housing design in rural Kenton Hundred did not take place. The introduction of the Queen Anne style in the 1870's had a very minor effect on building traditions. The only changes were decorative in nature. Cross gables, porches, and roof trim did not change the way the enclosed space was used. Even the Attix House (K-1303), with its projecting bay on the east gable, did not materially deviate from the accepted floorplan. The Wilds House (K-4978), which is the hundred's only Second Empire house, is in plan exactly the same as an L-plan house with its 3-bay, centerhall facade and rear wing to contain service functions. Even the one anomaly in the hundred, the Bailey House (K-1243) at Seven Hickories, is a series of formally laid out blocks that have been arranged in a pattern that, at a quick glance, seems to be just a collection of nonrelated parts.

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Page 1

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Multiple Resource Area Thematic Group dnr-11

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Multiple Resource Area Thematic Group

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⁷ 24.	Wilds, David, House	CDS SETT CIAS HOATOM	Attest Determined Keeper	Eligibio Patrick Andres 6/27/83
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25.	Williams, James, House	Entered in the National Registe	Keeper	Achores Byen, 6/27/8
26.	Wright-Carey House	Entered in the National Register	Attest fw/ Keeper	DelovaByen 6/27/8
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27.	Somerville (previously listed)	•	Keeper	
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28.	Boxwood (previously listed)		Keeper	
	(previously listed)		Attest	
29.	Aspendale (previously listed)		Keeper	
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30.	Cheney Clow's Fort Site (previously listed)	:	Keeper	
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