

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Item number N-6756

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INVENTORY FORM: WHITE CLAY CREEK HUNDRED MULTIPLE RESOURCE AREA

4. A. Property Name: James Steel House (N-6756)  
1016 West Church Road,  
Newark, Delaware

B. Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

The James Steel House is located on the northern side of West Church Road approximately .1 mile west of its junction with Walley Drive. The house and several related outbuildings are situated on a 15.76 acre irregularly-shaped parcel that has a frontage of approximately 1,080 feet along West Church Road and a maximum depth of approximately 915 feet (1982 New Castle County Property Tax Maps; Map Number 9-13, Parcel 23).

UTM References: A - 18/432820/4393660  
B - 18/432800/4393420  
C - 18/432525/4393580  
D - 18/432620/4393800

U.S.G.S. Quadrangle: Newark West, Md.-Del.-Pa.

C. Owner: Albert L. Lackman  
1016 West Church Road  
Newark, Delaware 19711

D. Property Description:

The James Steel House was constructed in three major phases and possesses architectural details from the Colonial period and the Greek Revival and Carpenter Gothic styles. Its eighteenth century main block was doubled in size by a facade addition in the 1880's, then a series of rear additions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created an overall T-plan.

The original structure, which dates from the late eighteenth century, is a two story, two bay, double pile, brick dwelling that has been stuccoed. Its wood-shingled gable roof has a narrow, molded box cornice; an interior end chimney passes through the ridge at the west endwall. This structure is lit by nine-over-six sash windows on the first floor and by six-over-six sash on the second floor. On the facade, a pent eave that was rebuilt in the 1960's passes between the two floors. The facade door has an added Greek Revival surround that is composed of flat pilasters, a five light transom and a molded cornice. The interior of this portion of the house has been remodeled.

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The 1880's facade addition is a two story, two bay, frame wing that retains the proportions of the main block, so that the facade presents a balanced four bay arrangement. This wing presents a subtle form of the Carpenter Gothic style that is commonly found on late nineteenth century rural homes in this region. Here, a two story bay window on the endwall, a pointed-arch attic window and German siding are the only elements that animate this otherwise plain rectangular form. The windows on this wing are two-over-two sash with plain board surrounds and plain dripboards. The first floor windows on all wings have raised two-panel shutters while those on the second floor have louvered shutters.

Later in the nineteenth century a gable-roofed, two story, two bay frame wing with an interior end chimney was added to the rear, creating a T-plan. Still later, a one story, one bay pantry was attached to the rear wing, and during the latter part of the twentieth century a second story was added to the pantry. A shed-roofed porch with four chamfered post supports extends along the east elevation of the rear wing and pantry.

Between the road and the western end of the house is a springhouse/smokehouse constructed of whitewashed uncoursed rubble fieldstone. Other outbuildings include three frame, gable-roofed sheds and some stone foundations.

E. Justification of Boundaries:

The entire legal parcel comprising 15.76 acres is included in this nomination in order to encompass as much of the original land associated with the house as possible while excluding intrusive elements. Having remained an open field, this parcel retains its integrity as the yardspace for the house and its cluster of outbuildings. The concept of recognizing the workable yardspace as an element of the household is an important one for early rural sites since the yard and house both contribute in maintaining the lifestyle of the occupants. In addition, the early settlement date and the continuous occupation of this site by the same family from the late eighteenth century through the 1950's indicate a potential for archeological information concerning the early period of this dwelling complex.

Modern residential development borders the parcel on the north, east and south. To the west it shares a boundary with the Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church and Cemetery, which is also being presented in this multiple resource nomination.

F. Significance:

Built by James Steel, a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian who lived in the western

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part of the hundred where he owned a large tract of land, this structure is significant for its role in the history and development of the Scotch Presbyterian community that settled in this part of the hundred shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century. The name Steel was an important one in this area, and the nominated dwelling had the distinction of remaining in the Steel family for 250 years. Constructed sometime during the eighteenth century, this brick dwelling is significant in that it presents the two story, two bay plan common to that period, as well as a late nineteenth century enlargement. This property is nominated to the National Register on the basis of criterion C for significance, as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. It is also nominated on the basis of criterion B because of its association with John Steel, a person important in the local past.

John Steel, an Irishman who settled in Philadelphia shortly after the turn of the eighteenth century, appears to have been an agent with the London Company. He was probably also a land speculator as he bought numerous tracts throughout the hundred. One of these tracts was located in the western part of the hundred adjacent to the Maryland State Line, and it also encompassed the area around the spring, said to be the source of the Christiana Creek. The Steels located their residence several hundred feet from the spring. This tract of land had the distinction of remaining in the Steel family from 1707 until the 1950's.

James Steel, son of John, inherited his father's land and in 1732 leased two acres to the Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church. The third church that was built for this congregation on that site (1859) is located approximately 200 feet west of the Steel House (see #7, N-1258).

The original block of the Steel's residence, a brick two bay, double pile plan, is a fairly common form in eighteenth century dwellings in New Castle County. An existing stone example of this form is "Rock Spring" in the Rockland Historic District (NR 1972).

In 1882, John Thomas Steel added a frame section to the right gable end of the eighteenth century brick structure. It is significant that by the late nineteenth century, most structures being built in the hundred were of frame rather than brick--and the architectural style followed the picturesque, irregular contours of the carpenter-gothic. Although rear additions were more common, there was certainly precedent for this type of facade addition in the area. One example in the immediate vicinity is the Blue Hen Farm (NR 1983), a two story, three bay stone dwelling that was raised to three stories and extended three additional bays in frame circa 1840.

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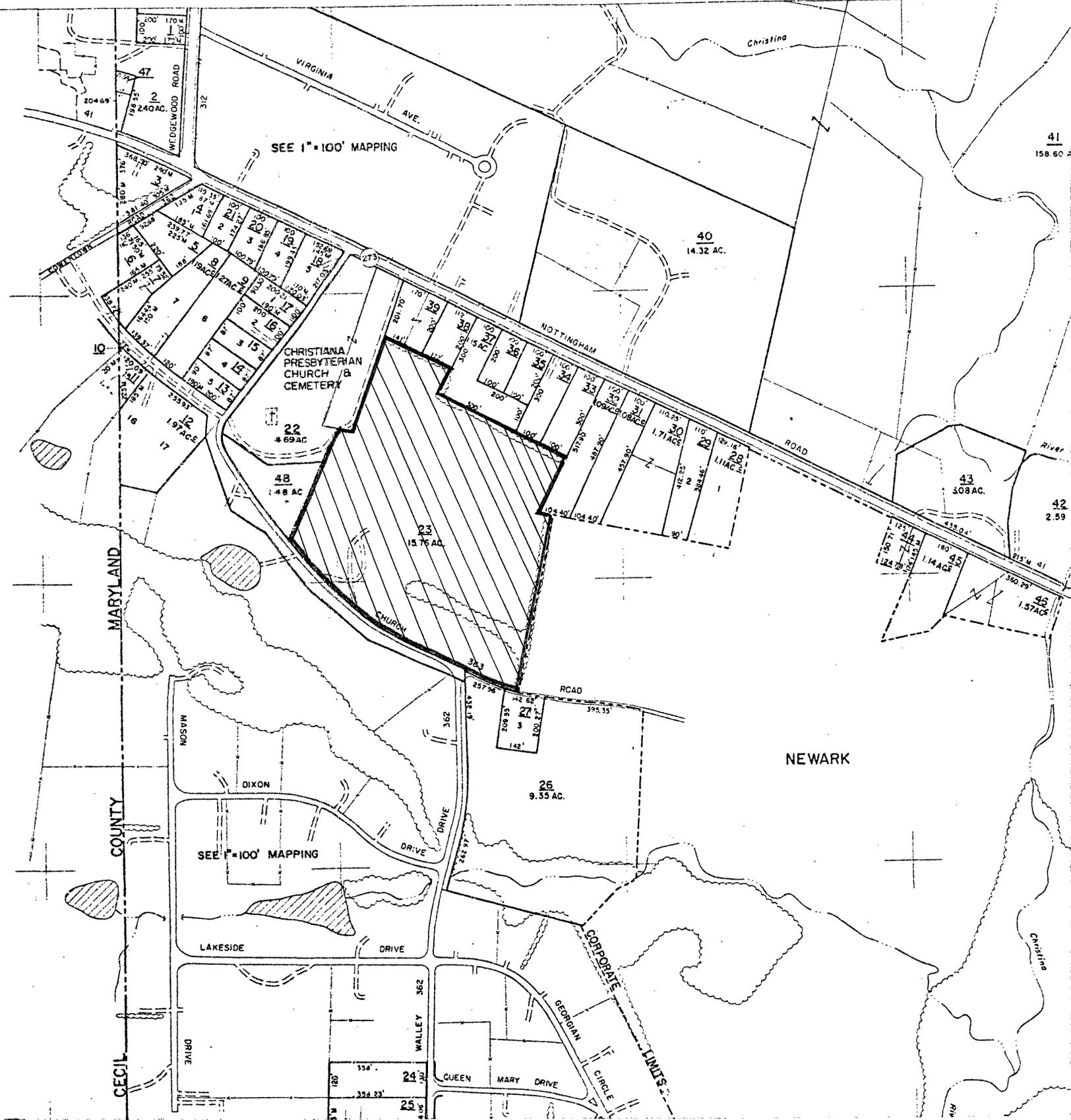
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Level of Significance:

While the construction of the Steel House and the circumstances surrounding this settlement in western New Castle County are illustrative of trends that are important to the development of the entire County, it is best understood at the local level. Evidence does not suggest pervasive influences.



SKETCH MAP

4. James Steel House (N-6756)  
 New Castle County Property  
 Tax Map, 1982  
 Map No. 9-13, Parcel 23  
 Scale 1 inch = 400 feet

