

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

ENVIRONMENT

The project area is located in Sussex County, within the Nanticoke River Watershed (Figure 3). The Nanticoke River flows into Maryland, and then the Chesapeake Bay. The Nanticoke River is tidal at Middleford. The soils in the streambed surrounding Bridge 238 are Johnston Silt Loam, which “consists of very deep, very poorly drained, nearly level soils on flood plains in the Coastal Plain” (USDA 2002). Other soils in the archaeological district include Evesboro loamy sand and Evesboro sand. The dominant vegetation in wooded areas in the vicinity is “black oak, white oak, and chestnut oak with scattered hickories, pitch pine, Virginia Pine and scrub and blackjack oaks” (USDA 1999). During the course of field investigations, bog iron was observed in the streambed. The immediate vicinity of the bridge today is characterized by wooded areas and suburban housing developments.

SUSSEX COUNTY HISTORY

Henry Hudson discovered the Delaware Bay in 1609. The earliest European occupation in the Sussex County area, however, did not begin until 1659, when Dutch immigrants settled at or near present-day Lewes in a settlement called Hoerenkil (Doherty 1997:3; Harbeson 1992:17; Scharf 1888:1221). Swedish immigrants had established Fort Christina on the Upper Peninsula to the north in 1638, and the Dutch had already established a settlement at Fort Casimir, on the Delaware River near modern-day New Castle, to block a Swedish advance to the south (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:9). A Dutch military presence forced the Swedes to relinquish power to them in 1655, although the Swedish and Finnish settlers remained.

The Dutch were soon inundated by English settlers, and tension between the two factions flared for many years, until Holland ceded many of its possessions extending from New York to Delaware to the English in 1676 (Harbeson 1992:17). The region was then placed under the jurisdiction of the Duke of York, with the top seat of government in New York. In 1670, Lord Charles Calvert I, third baron of Baltimore, created Durham County encompassing much of present-day Delaware and Maryland, including the present study region (Doherty 1997:51; Demars and Richards 1980:4-5). To help stop Lord Baltimore from claiming regions of Delaware, the Duke of York granted a large tract of the Delmarva peninsula to William Penn in 1682. Dispute over control of Delaware between what would become Pennsylvania and Maryland clouded the regional land patents for many years, and as a result, the south and west portions of Delaware were granted many Maryland patents (Figure 4; Russ 1966:12-13).

In 1682, Penn was given control of the distribution of the tracts, which he referred to as the lower three counties of Pennsylvania (Doherty 1997:3). The region was divided into townships that would contain 100 families, each of which contained approximately ten members. The townships were referred to as “hundreds” and these political designations have remained intact to modern times. Middleford was located in Northwest Fork Hundred, established in 1775, and in 1869, Seaford Hundred was created out of the southern half of Northwest Fork Hundred (Doherty 1997:5).

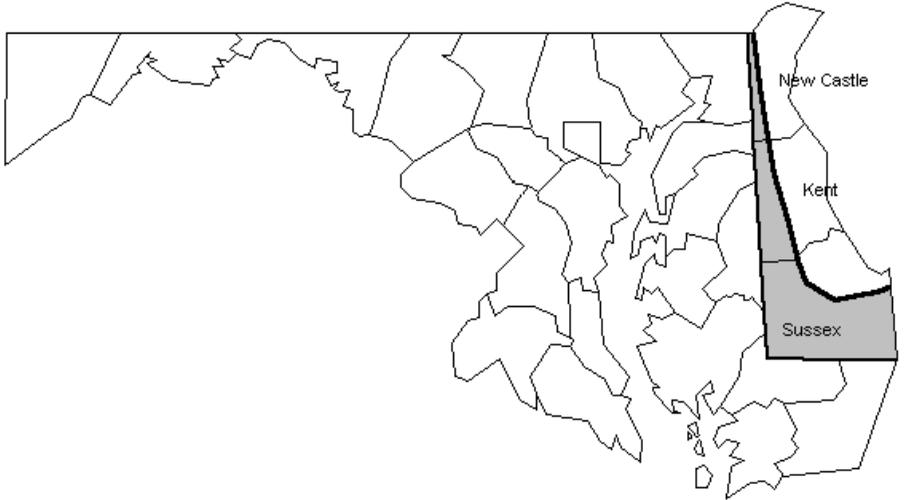


Figure 4: Lord Baltimore granted several patents to colonists in western Delaware (shown in grey).

Lord Baltimore continued to file land patents in the area, creating much confusion and resentment in Pennsylvania. Baltimore's grants were contested by Pennsylvania well into the 18th century, by which time Baltimore's son lost the claims (Demars and Richards 1980:4). The land grants issued in the Delaware prior to the 1750s, were mainly the result of the influx of the Swedish and English immigrants in the upper Delaware and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania region. The Sussex County land remained largely unpopulated except on the coastal regions (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:11-12).

Most of the residents of Sussex County in the 1700s were farmers, growing corn, rye, wheat, and tobacco as principal crops. Gristmills were some of the earliest industries in the area, and many became the hub of small hamlets or towns (O'Connor et al. 1985:13-14). The farms were successful, but were mainly subsistence oriented. They remained as such even though their counterparts in Kent and New Castle counties were able to shift to a market-based economy by the middle of the 18th century. The grist and flour mills of Brandywine Hundred, in particular, helped to bring financial growth to northern Kent and southern New Castle counties in the mid-1700s (Welsh 1973:79).

Deposits of limonite, or bog iron, were discovered in Sussex County in the mid-1700s, and soon iron ore processing sites were established across the region, including the Unity Forge near Concord, Collins Forge on Gravelly Branch, and Deep Creek Iron Works, northwest of Georgetown at Concord (Harbeson 1992:18-19; Heite 1974:18). The forges required an immense amount of fuel, and since coal was not locally available, the primary forests were harvested to produce charcoal (Passmore 1978:14). Mine owners either purchased thousands of acres outright or acquired the rights to work the land solely for the harvest of the timber. Blast furnaces for processing the ore were scattered across Delaware, the last one closing in 1836

(Passmore 1978:14). The need for charcoal, coupled with the need of lumber for ship and building construction, contributed to the rise in the number of sawmills in southwest Delaware.

Iron producing communities were many times characterized by the presence of a centralized furnace with peripheral farming, lumber, and charcoal related industries (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:13). In contrast to the hilly, northern piedmont, the flat, coastal regions of Sussex County demanded wide and substantial mill pond dams to create enough of a water head to operate the grist and sawmills, as well as the forges. In northern Kent County and all of New Castle County, mill pond dams were usually narrower than those in Sussex County because the watersheds were deeper and more constricted. As a result, more capital was needed to establish these industries in Sussex County, and many small communities that developed around the larger mill ponds contained all three industries. An analysis of the 1868 Beers Atlas indicates many of the grist and sawmills were located together, usually on the larger mill ponds.

Ships were constructed along the Nanticoke River as early as 1700, and were used for imports of all goods and to export the processed iron, charcoal, and lumber (Passmore 1978:11 and 64; De Cunzo and Catts 1990:10). After the Revolution, lumber continued as an important export for the region, and the fishing and oyster industry started to rise, increasing the need for more ships of all sizes and shapes; thus further supporting the lumber industry.

Deforestation and related soil erosion became one of the downsides of this economic growth. As the lumber and charcoal industry grew, the primary forests were harvested, and land was cleared and turned for cultivation. Trees were also harvested to uncover areas for mining bog iron. Clearing the forests led to the erosion of the unstable and unprotected topsoils, a widespread problem in colonial America (Cronon 1983). Such erosion could have resulted in the siltation of mill ponds and waterways of Delaware.

A second major problem affecting Sussex County's economic growth was the lack of roads despite the region's growing prosperity (Figure 5). Farmers and merchants in western Sussex County had to rely primarily on water transportation for exports and imports (Harbeson 1992:18). A wharf has been located on the Nanticoke River just down stream from the Middleford mills, indicating water traffic extended at least to that extent up that particular river. Yet the Kings Road, now Route 13, which was the main artery from north to south Delaware, did not extend to the southwestern portions of the state. Until Maryland and Pennsylvania settled the Delaware boundary disputes in the mid-18th century, Southern Delaware continued to lack a market-based economy, as compared to the rest of the State (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:10).

The lack of transportation infrastructure and local markets impeded commercial and social development. Without roads, goods could not be taken to market. Without market access, goods could not be brought into the region, nor would immigrants be encouraged to populate the area. Without the exports or imports, the region was severely stifled. Sussex County continued to lag behind the rest of the State in economic development throughout much of the 1800s.

After Delaware settled the land dispute with Pennsylvania in 1770, Sussex County was formed and was as large in surface area as New Castle and Kent counties combined (De Cunzo and Catts 1990:16-17). Since Sussex County was the southernmost county of Delaware, it was

also the furthest away from the larger markets and cities of New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.

Figure 5. 1749 map illustrating the lack of roads in the southwestern part of the state.

The lack of economic development also helped fuel “isolationism” that was greatly enhanced during the American Revolution. Over the next 100 years, Sussex County had a higher percentage of slaves than the upper two counties of the State, partly because of the greater prevalence of Tobacco cultivation there. As a result, Sussex County was torn during the civil war by the presence of both Union and Confederate sympathies throughout the region.

Sussex County is composed entirely of a coastal plain, whose sandy soils quickly lost their nutrients. Farmers learned in the early 1700s to rotate crops. Tobacco was grown on freshly cleared ground, while grains, such as wheat, corn, and rye, were grown mainly on previously tilled ground (Passmore 1978:22). However, farming practices in Delaware had still quickly leached the sandy soils of the major nutrients and led to the almost complete destruction of the topsoils by the 1830s (Passmore 1978:16). James C. Booth’s 1841 book entitled, *“Geological Survey of Delaware”* provided wonderful insight to the Delaware farmers to reconstitute their soils, and he is praised with saving agriculture in the region. He encouraged farmers to add oyster shell and marl to their fields. Booth praised central Sussex County as containing some of the more fertile soils of Delaware (Passmore 1978:19).

The coming of the railroad industry in the 1850s enabled the non-coastal central regions of Delaware to be settled (Figure 6; Passmore 1978:7). The smaller towns in rural central Delaware were then able to send their goods directly to interstate markets by train rather than by wagon and carts via the nearby seaports, such as Seaford and Milford. The railroad allowed all

industries to expand at a fast growth rate (Harbeson 1992:21). Yet by 1924, there still were only 15 miles of paved roads in the county (Passmore 1978:8).

Corn was the main agricultural crop in Sussex County during the colonial period, but was replaced by the fruit industry during the last half of the 19th century (Passmore 1978:24). The center for the peach industry was primarily in New Castle County, Kent County was known for apples, and the berry industry became popular in Sussex County. Sussex County grew more strawberries in 1902 than any other county in the country (Passmore 1978:72-73). By World War II, even the berry business gave way to the new and fast-growing broiler chicken industry.

Figure 6. 1862 map showing the railroads and roads of southern Delaware.

The 1920s and 1930s saw the development of the famous Delmarva broiler chicken industry. Since 1934, chickens have represented over half of the farm income for Delaware farmers (Passmore 1978:58). The success of the chicken industry has been credited for helping the local farmers to weather the Great Depression. The Soil Conservation Service established districts in Sussex County in 1944, and most farmers then had farm plans on file with the district, greatly enhancing their yields, making Delaware known as one of the agricultural centers of the central Atlantic seaboard (Passmore 1978:108).

SITE HISTORY

The history of the Middleford Mills Archaeological District begins in the 1760s, when the initial documented development of the area occurred. Nanticoke Hundred's first iron works company to incorporate was the Deep Creek Iron Works, headed by proprietor and iron master

Jonathan Vaughan of Chester County, Pennsylvania. Otherwise known as “Vaughan and Company,” the group, which included iron masters William Douglas and John Chamberlain, as well as Philadelphia merchants Persifer Frazer, Christopher Marshall and Daniel McMurtree, acquired large tracts of land on Deep Creek and the Nanticoke River. At Deep Creek, they built a furnace, called “Deep Creek Furnace,” and later referred to as “The Old Furnace.” Along the Nanticoke River at the head of the tide water, four miles east of Deep Creek, the company purchased three tracts of land, called “Venture,” “Company Lot,” and “Brother’s Agreement” in 1764. Venture and Company Lot were on the west side of the river, within and north of what would later become the 19th-century town of Middleford in Northwest Fork Hundred. Brother’s Agreement was on the east side of the river, in Nanticoke Hundred. Company Lot overlapped with portions of the two other tracts (Figure 7). The company constructed a dam across the river oriented north northwest by south southeast, and along the portion of the dam included in the Brother’s Agreement property, they built the “Nanticoke Forge” (Scharf 1888).

Figure 7: Birdseye view of the three tracts purchased by the Huffington Brothers and Townsend in 1805 as viewed circa 1831. The “Venture” tract became Middleford.

The location along the Nanticoke River was attractive to the iron company for several reasons. Much of Nanticoke Hundred contained sizeable bog iron deposits, which could be mined, then heated in a bloomery forge or bog ore furnace to produce iron. The bog iron was found in shallow pockets along local stream banks (Heite 1974). The area around what would become Middleford was no exception. Forges required both water power to operate their bellows, and a large supply of charcoal to feed their fires. This particular section of the Nanticoke river, being at or near the head of the tide water and having a wide, relatively flat bed and bank, was in an ideal location to construct a dam and mill pond that could produce the water power needed both for the forge, and for additional milling operations necessary for the upkeep

of the facility and its workers, such as a sawmill and a gristmill (Tunnell 1954). The land surrounding the river was rich in timber, which could be harvested to provide the charcoal needed for the fires. Last, the river itself could serve as a transportation route to move the finished products downstream to markets along the eastern seaboard and England via the Chesapeake Bay.

Vaughan and Company purchased large tracts of woodland within the vicinity of their furnace and forge sites, as well as in other parts of Sussex County. When the company reorganized in May 1764, admitting additional members William Wishart and Jemima Edwards, the new articles of agreement indicated they had acquired about 7,000 acres of land in total. At least 5,000 of these acres were located between the furnace and the forge sites. By 1770, the Nanticoke River location contained the forge, a gristmill, a sawmill, and a company store. While the forge was located within the Brother's Agreement property, which encompassed the eastern side of the river and part of the mill pond, the grist and sawmills appear to have been situated closer to the west side of the river, probably along the portion of the dam that fell within the Company Lot boundaries (Scharf 1888; Hancock 1976; Purvis n.d.). Three mill races (presumably one each for the forge, gristmill and sawmill) coursed downstream from the dam (Purvis n.d.).

The earliest surviving map of the Middleford Mills area is from 1807, the result of a Court of Common Pleas case involving another mill upstream (Figure 8; Kent County Warrants and Surveys B9 #177). The court case text has not survived, but its extant accompanying map clearly shows the three land tracts surrounding the river, and the 18th-century mill dam, now unused. Although the locations of the forge and associated mills are not illustrated, since the structures had been razed prior to this time, it is likely that all were situated along this original dam, with the forge located furthest to the east.

Like other iron works in Sussex County, the Nanticoke Forge endured until early in the Revolutionary War, when the British blockade of the Chesapeake Bay forced the companies out of business because they could not get their goods to market (Tunnell 1954). Jonathan Vaughan became a lieutenant colonel in the Continental Army, Persifer Frazer reached the rank of general, and many of the men formerly employed in the iron making business joined the call for troops. Although the blockade forced the forges and furnaces to close down, the saw and gristmills associated with the iron works continued to operate for local business during this period (Scharf 1888, Heite 1974).

Even though it did not resume operations after the war, the Deep Creek Iron Works still existed, at least in name, through the 1790s. Tax records from 1796 indicate the organization then was called Marshall, Wishart, Pennell & Company. However, because so many people had become involved in the partnership (most of the original proprietors had died, leaving multiple heirs), business could not be conducted and the lands and improvements could not be partitioned. Finally, after two petitions to the State Legislature by heir Levi Hollingsworth in 1801 and 1802, the state passed an act in January 1802 to partition the lands of Deep Creek Furnace, Nanticoke Forge, and lands purchased for their use (Heite 1974). The tract of land including the Nanticoke Forge area went to the heirs of Joseph Pennell (Scharf 1888, Sussex County Deed Book AB 25:114-117).

The first years of the 19th century marked the beginning of the second phase of development at Middleford. Brothers William Huffington, Jr., and James Huffington, and their partner Thomas Townsend purchased the Nanticoke Forge property, described as 168 ½ acres of land including parts of Brother's Agreement, Venture, and Company Lot, from the heirs of Joseph Pennell in January 1805 (Sussex County Deed Book AB 25:114-117). That same month, the trio filed articles of agreement to name the village of Middleford, and form the Middleford Company, which the new milling operations henceforth would be called (Sussex County Deed Book Z24:338-339). In 1806, the company purchased 400 acres of Brother's Agreement from John and Sarah Adams and William and Margaret Adams (Sussex County Deed Book AB 25:525-526).

The first construction project the Middleford Company undertook in 1805 was a new dam, located ca. 300 yards downstream from the 18th-century dam. The top of this dam now carries S 46. Next, along the northwestern end of the dam, the company constructed a sawmill and set of waste gates, just outside of the Brother's Agreement boundary. Within a year, the company had erected a gristmill just northwest of the sawmill (Huffington vs. Adams 1826). As shown on the 1807 map of the property, the two mills shared a single mill race, or waste gate. The map shows another mill race, or waste gate, at the extreme southeastern side of the mill pond, at or near the present location of Bridge 238. This mill race may represent a reused former mill race channel from the 18th-century dam further upstream. Between 1807, when the map

was made, and 1814, when William Huffington, Jr., died, Huffington constructed a third mill race and set of waste gates between the sawmill and the southeasternmost mill race and waste gate. Deponents in the 1826 court case all explicitly described two sets of waste gates on Brother's Agreement, erected by Huffington in his life time (Huffington vs. Adams 1826).

In addition to the mills, Huffington also built a new forge within the boundaries of Brother's Agreement, although its location is unclear. Since forges typically used water to operate the bellows, this forge likely would have been situated on the dam, or along one of the tail races. Historical records indicate that the forge did use charcoal to fuel its fires, and Huffington cut wood from portions of Brother's Agreement over the course of several years to meet these requirements. The logs, primarily pine, were coaled (turned into charcoal) right on the ground where they had been felled. Soon after they purchased it, William and James Huffington had cleared at least one field within the tract on which to plant corn; the trees from this field were coaled and used in the forge. The wood needed to build the forge itself also came from trees on this property. Some deponents in the 1826 court case believed that Huffington had harvested additional wood from Brother's Agreement and sold the timber, principally oak, in the Baltimore markets (Huffington vs. Adams 1826).

At the time of his death in 1814, William Huffington, Jr., was the sole owner of the Middleford Company. Thomas Townsend had sold his interest in August 1805, and James Huffington had relinquished his share in 1807 (Sussex County Deed Book AB 25:117-118, 525-526; Huffington vs. Adams 1826). Because Huffington died intestate, his estate was administered by the county Orphans Court (Sussex County Orphans Court Case Files 1815). Complicating matters was the fact that after Huffington died, neighboring landowner Jesse Green instituted an "ejection suit" against Huffington's heirs, claiming that the land constituting Brother's Agreement had been sold to the Huffingtons under a false title. The land in question had been addressed in several Court of Common Pleas court cases during the 1810s, during which William Huffington, Jr., and Jesse Green had battled over ownership (the court cases are addressed in Huffington vs. Adams 1826). The courts had ruled in favor of Huffington, but at his death, Green again attempted to regain the land, and this time he won. Ultimately, the Huffington heirs had to relinquish 300 of the 400 acres of Brother's Agreement to Green (Huffington vs. Adams 1826).

The 100 acres of Brother's Agreement including the mill tract remained in the possession of Huffington's sons, William and Edward Huffington, after his death in 1814. In 1817, Edward released his share of the property to William (Sussex County Deed Book AK 33:326). However, a separate Court of Common Pleas suit against the heirs, in 1823, made by George and Jacob Lindenburger and Jacob Walter, of Baltimore, found in favor of the plaintiffs, and Sussex County sheriff, Levin Stuart, had to seize the mill property and sell it at public auction to cover the incurred debts and damages (addressed in Huffington vs. Adams 1826). Mitchell Huffington, the younger brother of William and Edward Huffington, purchased the mill property (now comprising 170 acres) at the 1823 sheriff's sale, and immediately sold the tract back to former Middleford Company partner, Thomas Townsend (Sussex County Deed Book AM 35:564-565; Huffington vs. Adams 1826).

It appears that the mills at Middleford continued to operate after William Huffington, Jr.'s, death, although the forge seems to have closed soon after he died. Deponents in the 1826 court case indicated that Huffington's sons did not continue to operate the forge much longer after their father's death. In 1826, the 100 acres of Brother's Agreement contained the aforementioned two sets of waste gates on the mill dam, several small frame tenant houses, and a few peach trees. Most of the remaining timber on the 100 acres had been harvested by Huffington (Huffington vs. Adams 1826).

At the time that William Huffington, Jr., died, local residents believed that he was insolvent, and that the mill property and its profits could not cover his debts (Huffington vs. Adams 1826). Perhaps as a reaction to Huffington's economic situation, shortly after Thomas Townsend took over the mills he rebuilt the complex to achieve greater production and profits. At the time, Townsend also owned a grist and sawmill complex in Little Creek Hundred, called "Big Mills," located about one mile below Laurel, which his father had built before 1800 (Sussex County Orphans Court Case Files; Purvis n.d.). By 1825, Townsend had found a way to kiln-dry cornmeal for shipment to distant markets. His invention allowed him to export large quantities of local crops, particularly to the West Indies, which resulted in substantial profits. In order to accommodate the shipments, Townsend employed eight coopers to make puncheons and barrels. The products were loaded on ships directly from the mill, and sent down river (Scharf 1888; Purvis n.d.).

Thomas Townsend died intestate in 1827, forcing the county Orphans Court to administer his estate. By 1832, his oldest son, local merchant, Barkley Townsend, became heir to most of the property, having settled accounts with his siblings, all of whom were underage at the time of their father's death. Townsend inherited two-thirds of the estate, while his mother, Mary, who later married Alexander Campbell, received the customary one-third part widow's dower (Sussex County Orphans Court Case Files 1831-1832).

In 1831, as part of the Orphans Court proceedings, Barkley Townsend commissioned a survey of the Middleford Mills complex and adjacent lands. Figure 9 shows the extent of the area's development since its last depiction in 1807. Most notably, the town of Middleford is illustrated to the northwest of the mill dam, and the mill pond appears with four mill races or waste gates. Separate races are shown for the gristmill and the sawmill (unlike the 1807 map, where they appear on opposite sides of the same race), and two waste gate races appear to the southeast of the mill races, within the Brother's Agreement property. The land slated for the widow's dower appears north of the town grid.

Barkley Townsend was only in his twenties when he inherited the Middleford Mills complex. To pay his siblings for their share of the estate, and in order to keep the mills running, he had to raise a substantial amount of capital. He approached local businessmen James Buchanan and Levin Stuart to back the venture, but they agreed only after Townsend resolved to sell half the interest in the mills to another party. They felt that Townsend was too young and the property was too large for him to manage himself. Townsend and his wife sold half the interest in the mills to Robert Houston in April 1832, although the deed officially was not recorded until 1836, after a chancery court suit between Houston and the heirs of Thomas Townsend involving the mills' ownership (Sussex County Chancery Case File H67, Robert

Houston et al. vs. Lewis West et al 1840-47, hereafter referred to as Houston vs. West 1840-47; Sussex County Deed Book 45:380-384).

Figure 9: The 1831 plat of Middleford showing town lots and the mills.

The Houston vs. West 1840-47 chancery court case forms the basis for much of the information known about the Middleford Mills in the 1830s and 1840s. According to one deponent in the case, Barkley Townsend chose to sell half his interest to Robert Houston because Townsend thought Houston would be a good partner, despite the fact that another buyer might have offered more money. Houston paid Townsend \$600, part of which included half interest in a “vessel” (presumably a sailing vessel) owned by Houston (Houston vs. West 1840-47).

The sale to Houston was well known within the local community, although some were unhappy with the transaction. In particular, William and Michael Stuart, who had rented the Middleford sawmill from Townsend in the past, were looking to acquire an interest in the property (Houston vs. West 1840-47). William already owned a store house and counting house in Middleford and a tract called “Vaulti,” south of Brother’s Agreement along the old forge race, both purchased from Thomas and Mary Townsend in 1825. In addition, he owned the “Big Mills” complex in Little Creek Hundred, which Barkley Townsend sold as his father’s heir in 1829 (Sussex County Deed Book AO 37:205-206, 206-207; Sussex County Orphans Court Case Files 1831-32). Michael owned and operated a store in Middleford at the time as well, and

Barkley Townsend owed him money. The two men's wives were sisters (Houston vs. West 1840-47).

Eventually, in August 1832, Barkley Townsend capitulated and sold his remaining half of the mill property to William and Michael Stuart (Sussex County Deed Book 43:313-314). For the rest of the 1830s and into the 1840s, the Stuarts and Houston owned the mills and associated real estate as "tenants in common" (Sussex County Chancery Court, Volume C, pp. 87-98).

Several important events occurred in the mid-1840s that would affect the Middleford Mills significantly. In 1845, Robert Houston sold his half of the mill property (excepting a small lot leased to William and Michael Stuart for a cooper shop) to Lot Rawlins, a successful local merchant and businessman who was already beginning to acquire property in and around Middleford (Sussex County Deed Book 52:238). Rawlins and his sons would run the mill complex for the next 50 years. In 1846, the gristmill caught fire and became inoperable for over a decade (Scharf 1888:1304-1305). Robert Houston had insured the gristmill against fire with the Delaware Fire Insurance Company while he owned the property, but Lot Rawlins had to sue the insurance company in Sussex County Superior Court in order to collect the damages. The money was not awarded until 1849, and in 1852, tax records indicate the gristmill still had not been rebuilt (Sussex County Case Files 1858).

The same year the gristmill burned, William and Michael Stuart petitioned the Sussex County Chancery Court to divide the mill property among the current owners. The court ordered a survey made, which survives but is severely torn and damaged (Figure 10). The portions of the map that are legible show the gristmill as burned, both waste gates in operation, a "small house now occupied as a cooper's shop" between the two waste gates and north of the dam, and a "small house formerly occupied by Betsy O'Day" on the east bank of the mill pond. The land south of Brother's Agreement, including part of the waste gate run, was owned by William Stuart. The court ruled that the mill property should not be physically divided, but rather each owner should be given a share in the operation. The court gave William and Michael Stuart each $\frac{1}{4}$ interest, and Lot Rawlins $\frac{1}{2}$ interest in the mills and property. The Stuarts each were entitled to use the mills one week in four, and Rawlins two weeks in four. Various Middleford town lots, also part of the mill property, were assigned to each man (Sussex County Chancery Court, Volume C, pp. 87-98, William and Michael Stuart vs. Lot Rawlins 1846).

William and Michael Stuart did not utilize their shares of the mill property beyond the 1840s. In 1848, William died, leaving his son James (Michael's brother) as executor of his estate and chief heir (Sussex County Orphans Court Case Files 1848-49). By 1849, Michael had relocated to Baltimore, leaving James to control his share of the mills as well (Sussex County Probates). Michael died in 1850, and although his interest in the mills passed to his six children, by 1855 only two of the children were still living, both girls under 21 (Sussex County Orphans Court Case Files 1850; Sussex County Probates). Their uncle James Stuart petitioned to administer Michael's estate that year, thereby acquiring possession, if not outright ownership, of $\frac{1}{2}$ the mill property (Sussex County Chancery Court Case Files 1855).

After William and Michael Stuart died, the ownership of their half of the mills becomes unclear. While James Stuart occupied and operated the mills during this period, there is no evidence he actually owned the property. His name does not appear as an owner in tax records, and there are no deeds indicating he acquired or sold the land. At some point during the 1850s, Lot Rawlins appears to have acquired the Stuarts' half of the mills, although the circumstances are uncertain. That there was a dispute or feud between Lot Rawlins and James Stuart seems likely, though. In Rawlins will, first recorded in 1856 (six years before his death), he stipulated that none of his children sell any of his real estate to Stuart, Stuart's heirs, or those who might sell to Stuart or his heirs, for a period of 50 years. If they did so, the title of the land would revert to Rawlins' other children (Sussex County Will Book M12:43-46). According to tax and deed records, Rawlins' sons and grandson maintained sole possession of the Middleford Mills until 1900, fulfilling Lot's wishes.

The problems between Lot Rawlins and James Stuart may have set back reconstruction of the gristmill longer than normally would have been the case. During the 11 years that the mill was inoperable, the town of Middleford began to decline, as businesses that relied on the mills faltered and residents moved away (Purvis n.d.). In 1857, Rawlins' sons, John M. and James, rebuilt the gristmill, using the foundations of the previous mill, and constructed a new sawmill to the east (Scharf 1888:1304-1305). Business revived, but it was too late to stem the town's downfall. For the next 40 years, the Rawlins brothers operated the Middleford Mills with considerable success, but concurrently witnessed the town's demise. For example, during the 1840s there had been seven or eight stores in Middleford, but by 1887 there was only one left (Scharf 1888). The last map of Middleford made in the 19th century illustrates the town and the mills in 1860, following a survey made as part of the estate division for Barclay Townsend, deceased. The map illustrates the two mills, the town of Middleford, the mill pond, and the waste gates for the pond (Figure 11; Sussex County Orphans Court Vol. AA-28).

Beginning in the second half of the 19th century, industry censuses and insurance records provide detailed accounts of the Middleford Mills, their components, and their products. In 1850, census takers recorded no industry at Middleford, as the gristmill had not been rebuilt yet (Census 1850). By 1860, however, the takers described a gristmill, a sawmill, and a carding mill. The carding mill had been constructed in 1859 (Scharf 1888). The gristmill used water power and two sets of milling stones to process wheat, buckwheat, corn, and other grains. The sawmill used water power and two saws to turn timber into lumber. The carding mill, which the census noted was idle for 7 months of that year, also used water power to card wool. Although the census valued the gristmill and the sawmill equally (each were worth \$3,000), the gristmill yielded over \$7,000 worth of annual revenue, while the sawmill produced only \$2,400 worth of yearly income. The carding mill, despite being valued at only \$500 and “at rest” for 7 months that year, nevertheless produced \$2,200 worth of income (Census 1860).

The 1870 industry census indicated that there were now four mills at Middleford: the gristmill, the sawmill, the carding mill, and a planing mill, built in 1864 (Scharf 1888). All were

powered by iron water wheels. The gristmill and sawmill had a horsepower of 20 each, while horsepower for the planing mill and carding mill are listed as 18 and 10, respectively. Production was down from 1860 at both the gristmill and the sawmill (in 1870 the gristmill did \$5,950 worth of business and the sawmill did \$1,800 worth of business), but up at the carding mill (with a total of 3,546 in revenue). The planing mill, which used three circular saws to process mainly yellow pine timber, yielded \$2400 in revenue that year. It was valued at \$1,000 (Census 1870).

During the 1860s and 1870s, the Rawlins brothers took out fire insurance policies on the mill buildings from the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company. A policy in 1867 covered the planing mill, sawmill, and carding mill. According to the policy, the planing mill was a one-and-a-half-story frame building measuring 20 x 40 feet. It had one room on the bottom floor, which contained the mill and one circular saw, with two additional circular saws on the upper floor. The sawmill was a single-story frame building measuring 20 x 50 feet. The carding mill consisted of a two-room, single-story frame building measuring 16 x 24 feet, containing two carding machines. The policy described the mill complex layout as well. The carding mill was located ca. 25 feet from the gristmill (which at the time was insured through another company), the planing mill was located ca. 64 feet from the carding mill, and the sawmill was located ca. 100 feet from the planing mill (Kent County Mutual Insurance Company Policy 2616). By 1873, the Rawlins brothers had transferred the gristmill policy to the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company as well. The policy described the building as two stories with a basement, measuring 30 x 40 feet. The basement had brick walls but the upper floors were wood frame (Kent County Mutual Insurance Company Policy 4364).

The 1860 industrial census shows that Lot Rawlins was operating a sawmill, gristmill, and carding machines. All were water powered, but the size and horsepower of the wheels is not given. The sawmill included 2 saws, and the gristmill 2 run of stones. The carding machines were not in operation 7 months of the year (Industrial Census 1860). The 1870 industrial census for Seaford Hundred lists a gristmill, sawmill, planing mill, and carding mill. Each was powered by an iron wheel; the gristmill wheel had 20 horsepower, the lumber mill 20 hp, the planing mill 18 hp, and the carding mill wheel had 10 hp. The gristmill was in operation 12 months of the year full-time, the lumber mill was in operation 10 months, the planing mill 6 months, and the carding mill 3 months. An 1867 insurance policy describes the carding mill as 25 feet from the gristmill, the planing mill as 64 feet from the carding mill, and the sawmill as 100 feet from the planing mill. Figure 12 shows a possible arrangement of these mills along the dam.

This reconstruction assumes that the gristmill and sawmill were still in the locations suggested by earlier maps, that the carding mill shared a race with the gristmill, and that the arrangement of the buildings is linear. Of note is that the industrial census and insurance records suggest that there may have been an additional race that is not shown on earlier or later maps, and is no longer visible, but that lay between the race for the grist and carding mills and the race for the sawmill. In 1880, the industrial census describes the gristmill as having 2 wheels with 6 feet of head, one of 36 feet in diameter with 25 hp, and another of 30 feet in diameter with 15 hp. It also lists a sawmill with one wheel of 48 feet in diameter, 7 feet of head, and 18 hp. There is no mention of a planing mill or carding mill; perhaps the second wheel listed for the gristmill

had previously been used for the carding mill. Both the sawmill and gristmill are described as in full operation 12 months of the year.

The Middleford mills continued to operate until the 1890s, when the deaths of both Rawlins brothers caused the business to fold. Their heirs put the mill property up for sale, but there were no takers until 1900, when Robert Purvis, a former machine shop owner from Philadelphia, and more recently Laurel Springs, New Jersey, purchased the land and the mill buildings (Sussex County Deed Book 135:85). He moved his manufacturing operations into the old gristmill, although he was unable to harness enough water power to run his machines, and instead had to use steam and gasoline engines (Purvis n.d.).

A map of the Middleford Mills area was made in 1900, when the heirs of John M. Rawlins sold the property to Purvis (Figure 13; Sussex County Deed Book 135:85). The plot indicated that the ca. 114 acres of land included the northwestern 100 acres of the original Brother's Agreement, plus additional lands within and adjacent to the mill pond. The map also shows that the four mill races were still in place. A circular-shaped area downstream from the Bridge 238 area suggests that race experienced some dredging, quarrying, or excavations just below the dam. The roughly circular depictions match current aerial maps, which show these areas as well.

At some time during the first decade of the 20th century, the Middleford Mill pond ceased to exist. A probable breach in the dam rechanneled the main course of the Nanticoke River through the dam's middle waste gate, which currently flows under Bridge 237. A map of Middleford made ca. 1908 shows that the mill pond still existed as of that date (Figure 14; Friedel 1970). However, by the time the earliest U.S.G.S. map of the area was made in 1915, the river's course ran through the middle waste gate, and the mill pond no longer existed (Figure 15). The pond's former location contained marshland (U.S.G.S. 1915).

Robert Purvis died intestate in 1921. Since he had no wife at the time, his property passed to his children. Through a series of deeds in 1923, his son John became the owner of the former gristmill and the town lot on which it sat, and his four daughters and their husbands became the owners of the remainder of the Middleford Mills tract, totaling 113 acres of land (Sussex County Deed Book 239:548-551; 552-554). None of the Purvis heirs lived in Middleford at the time, and the property appears to have sat largely unoccupied for the next 20 years.

In 1932, the widening of what would become S 46 necessitated demolition of the former gristmill, which still housed Robert Purvis' machine shop equipment. The timbers of the building were still usable, and were distributed to various individuals for reuse. South of S 46, across the street from the gristmill site, the same man who dismantled the mill erected a new concrete-block building where the machinery was transferred, although it was never employed (Purvis n.d.). Bridge 238, a timber stringer span that replaced a corrugated iron pipe bridge, was constructed in 1936 (Spero 1991).

In 1943, Purvis' heirs sold the mill tract to local land speculator H. Rafe Griffith (Sussex County Deed Book 340:225-228). He in turn divided the property into smaller parcels, and resold them to individual buyers two years later. Some of these parcels were formerly under the waters of the mill pond. The division of the mill tract into residential lots in 1945 marks the end of the Middleford Mills history. Since 1945, all of the parcels have changed hands, some several times. Today, the area supports various types of residential structures.

THE MIDDLEFORD COMMUNITY

Even though Jonathan Vaughan and partners from Pennsylvania first developed industry in the Middleford area in 1763, little is known about the region until the first part of the 19th century (Munroe 1978:201). The three main themes of Middleford's community history relate to the ownership of lots and businesses in town, occupations of Middleford residents, and the ethnic identity of residents. Some of the residents owned lots in town, but others rented houses and businesses, mostly from the largest landowners in Middleford, who were generally owners of the

mill complex. Middleford developed into a thriving community of just over 400 people of many different occupations relating to the mill industry by the mid-1800s, generally declining from that high point to the end of the 19th century. Finally, Middleford also counted many free persons of color among its citizens prior to the Civil War, even though many local residents still owned slaves. Research into development of Middleford town lots was used to create artist birds-eye-view reconstructions of the town and mill area at various points in its history. These are shown in Figures 15, 16, and 17.

Founding the community:

The Huffington brothers (James and William, Jr.) and Thomas Townsend acquired the land containing the old Nanticoke Forge in January 1805 from the estate of Joseph Pennell through an Act of the General Assembly (SCDB AB25:114-117). The three had been involved with the purchase of other milling operations and were expanding their ventures. On January 20, 1805, just a few days after the acquisition, the trio formed the milling group entitled the Middleford Company, and the tract to the west of the millpond was to be known as Middleford (pronounced locally as Middle-FORD) (SCDB Z24:338-339).

“...Article the first, Resolved that we the contracting partys do mutually agree to make the above described premises known by the name of Middleford in place of Nanticoke forge also do assure to ourselves in the above mentioned partnership the name and title of the Middleford Company...” (SCDB Z24:338-339).

The Nanticoke Forge had been in operation since at least the mid-1760s, and more than likely some structures were present in the region when the Huffington and Townsend group purchased the land. However, the composition of the workers and residents in the area between the 1760s and 1805 is unknown. Since the area was apparently not developed as a town or a named community until 1805, no name can be used to tie the local population with an exact location. If any residences or commercial buildings were located on the property purchased for Middleford in 1805, they were not illustrated on the plot in the deed book drafted at the time of the purchase (Figure 18).

Figure 18: The Venture Tract, the future site of Middleford for the Huffington brothers and Thomas Townsend in 1805 (Kent County Warrants and Surveys B9 #177).

Scharf (1888) suggested that the names of “Brother’s Agreement”, “Company Lot”, and “Venture” were titles assigned to the three tracts prior to the Huffington and Townsend purchase in 1805, perhaps as early as the mid-18th century. However, the first mention of the formal titles does not appear until 1805, in the deed when the two Huffington brothers and Townsend agreed to purchase the old forge and mill site, form a new company, and embark on a new venture by plotting out a new town named Middleford. In essence, the names probably originate in the 1805 document and not from an earlier transaction. To further support this statement, the boundary of the “Venture” tract closely matched the boundaries of the newly plotted town. It is

suggested that the names were given to at least “Brother’s Agreement” and “Venture” when the 1805 transaction transpired. The land under ownership of the Middleford Company encompassed both sides of the Nanticoke River, with some land to the south of where the new dam would be constructed and the majority above (or to the north) encompassing the older Nanticoke Forge dam and races (Figure 15).

The above agreement mentioned that lands owned by the company within the town of Middleford would be either sold and given directly to the purchaser without further concern by the company, or used by the company for their own purposes (SCDB Z24:338-339). This opened the door for the purchase of lots that were apparently laid out to the west of the mills as early as 1806. No doubt, the Huffington brothers and Townsend were eager and hopeful the community would thrive and grow. The original town of Middleford was laid out containing at least 63 lots, averaging two acres each. It is assumed that the company had a plat where they could draft the locations of their tracts and those sold to patrons, but there is no evidence of this. Thomas Townsend sold his portion of the operation to William Huffington, Jr., in August 1805, just a few months after the trio purchased the mill and adjacent tracts. James Huffington, Jr., sold his interest in the mill and other tracts to William Huffington, Jr., in 1807 for just over \$4,000, giving the latter full ownership of the operation (SCDB AD27:352-353).

The main road through town came north and east from Seaford, crossed the mill dam and races, and continued eastward to Georgetown. Market Street was an extension of the road across the dam and races. Other streets in town parallel to Market Street were Spring, Oak, Fairfax, and Spruce. The cross streets were Front (along the river), Gay, Vine, and Liberty. All of the streets were 40 feet wide, except for Market Street, which was 50 feet wide (Sussex County Orphan Court Case File Barkley Townsend 1858).

The Town Lots:

A year and a half would pass after the naming of Middleford before anyone purchased a lot in the village. Only 12 lots (19%) were purchased directly from the mill company in the first 40 years of Middleford’s existence. On December 12, 1806, Daniel Oney, a free person of color, became the first person listed in the Sussex County deed books to purchase a lot in the community (SCDB AC26:396-397). Oney paid \$25 for Lot # 29, located adjacent to the west side of the millpond north of the dam (Figure 19). At the time, Oney was also the only free person of color in town (1807 SCTA).

More than likely, Daniel Oney’s lot did not contain a structure when he purchased it, as reflected by the low price. The majority of the early lots sold in Middleford from 1806 to 1812 ranged from \$25 to \$65 with no mention of buildings on the premises (Table 1). In 1811, Daniel Trimbal purchased a lot for \$450 and houses were mentioned in the deed transaction, with the price suggesting a rather substantial structure (SCDB AF29:336-337). Frequently, Probate or Orphan Court records provide information on structural analysis, but none has been found yet for Middleford buildings aside from the mill operations.

The mill owners retained ownership over most of the town. Deed records indicated that only five town lots had been sold by 1810. Over 88 people were listed in the census ten years later (1820 Federal Population Census for Sussex County, Delaware). Only 12 deeds were discovered in the deed books where patrons purchased directly from the Huffington and Townsend families (basically the company) for lots in the village of Middleford. Whether by intention or not, the ratio of lots sold compared to the number of people listed as residing in the community, indicated that early on, most residents rented from the mill company. It is probable that the company intended to sell all the lots in Middleford to individuals or other speculators but could not find a significant number of buyers for the 63 lots. Not being able to “unload” the lots, the various owners of the mills kept selling them to the next mill purchaser. Middleford appears to have been a company town.

Table 1: List of original owners of the private lots sold in Middleford from 1806 to 1825.

Name	Occupation	Lot	Date	Instrument	Amount
Oney, Daniel (free person of color)	Unknown	29	December 12, 1806	SCDB AC26:396- 397	\$25
Needham, Michael	Unknown	11	February 5, 1807	SCDB AE28:313- 314	\$60
Ellingsworth, William	House carpenter	4	February 5, 1807	SCDB AC26:397- 398	\$30
Dulaney, William Jr.	House carpenter & joiner	S ½ of 22	March 28, 1809	SCDB AE28:326- 327	\$35
Hudson, Daniel	Blacksmith	5	August 29, 1810	SCDB AF29:337	\$50
Dulaney, William Jr.	Unknown	18	February 26, 1811	SCDB AF29:335	\$40
Carey, Mitchell	Unknown	37	May 10, 1811	SCDB AF29:335- 336	\$50
Trimbal, Daniel	Unknown	23 and houses	April 20, 1811	SCDB AF29:336- 337	\$450
Short, Isaac	Unknown	10	May 14, 1812	SCDB AG30:223-224	\$65
Rawlins, Lot	Unknown	2	November 26, 1817	SCDB AL 34:3-4	\$100
Elliot, Hooper	Ship carpenter	51	April 10, 1824	SCDB AO37:186	\$100
Stuart (Stewart), William	Unknown	1	November 19, 1825	SCDB AO37- 206-207	\$450

By the time that Middleford was 25 years old (1830), Thomas Townsend had died and his son, Barkley Townsend inherited the mills and a large percentage of the town. Thomas' widow married Alexander Campbell (Sussex County Orphan Court Case File Barkley Townsend 1858). The town could boast a population of just over 130 inhabitants, and the post office had just been established. Thomas and Mary Townsend had donated Lot 31 to the Methodist Episcopal Church for a Meeting House, which was constructed by 1831 (SCDB AQ39:238; Act of the General Assembly 1833:246-247).

Barkley Townsend married Leah (maiden name unknown) on August 15, 1826 and died June 4, 1857 (Sussex County Orphan Court Case File Barkley Townsend 1858). He received the following lots in Middleford from his father Thomas' estate in 1832: 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 50, 53, 54, 60, 61, 62, 63 (Figure 20). As the 1831 plat indicated, the main row of structures in the town at that time were aligned east-west along Market Street (Figure 21). People coming across the dam road from the east would be able to look down Market Street and see the majority of the community in a single view.

William and Michael Stuart (a.k.a. Stewart) had lived in the Middleford area and had been buying up a few of the lots in town. Michael Stuart owned a grocery store and a son or nephew, James Stuart, was one of the earliest, if not the first, postmaster for Middleford (Blair and Rives 1836:97). Lot Rawlins, just as the Stuarts, had also been purchasing lots in town, and his son, John M. Rawlins, was postmaster by 1859 (Leech 1859:96). The fact that both the Stuarts and the Rawlins would own part and/or all of the mill and over half the town, as well as the grocery and post offices, indicated how involved the company owners were in the community, or company town.

Figure 20: Barkley Townsend lots in 1831 (BT) with privately owned lots (dark grey).

A few of the Middleford town tracts were plotted when they were sold or transferred, relating information on the house size, shape, and location within the tract, including a well location (Figure 22; SCOC Case File for Mitchell Carey 1835). Figure 22 also contained information on the two neighboring tracts, showing they belonged to James Stuart and the mill property owners.

Sale bills for auctions and land sales were placed in each surrounding community to bring as much interest to the event as possible (Figure 23). The reverse side of the following sale bill provided the names and locations of ten sale bill signs posted in the region for the sale of Hooper Elliot's lot at the house of Lorenzo Dow Morgan (Figure 24).

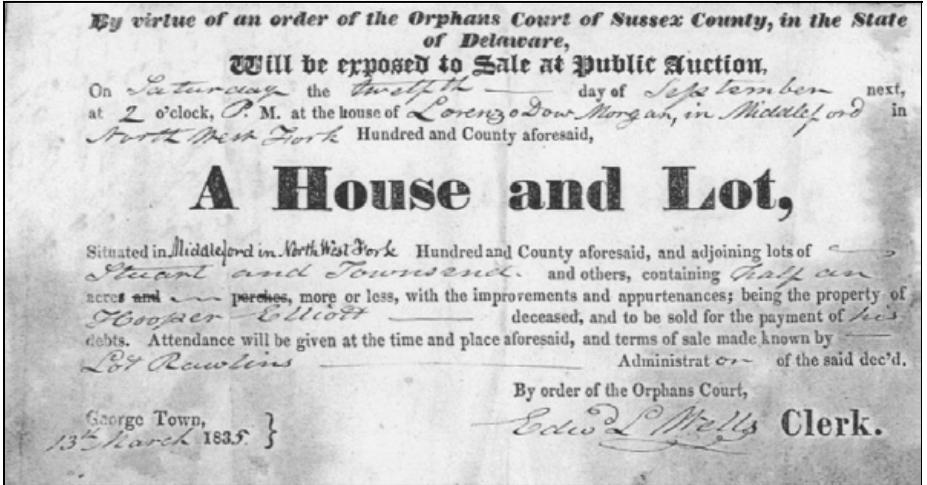


Figure 23: Front of a sale notice for Hooper Elliot's Lot #51 and house in Middleford in 1835.

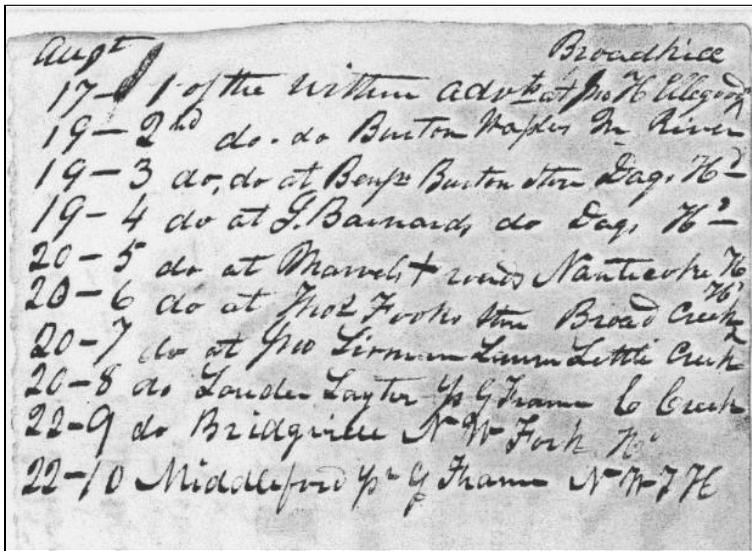


Figure 24: Back of an 1835 sale notice for Hooper Elliot's Lot #51 and house in Middleford listing the places the bill was advertised, including Middleford.

When the Middleford lots were distributed among Michael Stuart, William Stuart and Lot Rawlins in 1846, almost all of the lands were lots that Barkley Townsend had received from his father, Thomas (Figure 25). The Rawlins family would still retain a large portion of the mill tracts and the town of Middleford until the end of the 19th century. Letters about purchasing timbers from Pennsylvania to build the mills and races still survive (personal conversation with Dr. John Rawlins, October 5, 2001). The 1846 plat of the community illustrated an alignment of structures along Front Street, whereas in 1831 there was an alignment along Market Street (Figure 26). The shift could represent different building phases that may be difficult to identify in the archival record. It is also possible that the 1846 map only illustrated the buildings constructed since the 1831 plat.

A fire in 1846 left the Middleford Mills inoperable for almost a decade (Scharf 1888). This event occurred when Middleford was apparently at its peak of population and housing. The 1840 Federal Population Census showed the town with a population of 444 residents, a number that never again would Middleford be able to match. During this time frame, the Rawlins family assumed control from the Stuarts and Mrs. Townsend. Although the resulting down time may not have originally destroyed the town, after the Civil War, the population began to rapidly decline. The Delaware Railroad was constructed through the Northwest and Seaford Hundreds in 1858, bypassing Middleford and businesses continued to suffer (Conrad 1908:704-6). The reliance on water transportation and rough overland routes was over, and the mariners moved away from Middleford, replaced by farmers and farm laborers.

The population of Middleford was cut in half by 1850 (221). However, after the mills were up and running in the late 1850s, the town population rebounded almost 30 percent (313) by 1860. The plat of Middleford in the 1868 Baist Atlas indicated the Rawlins and Stuarts still owned several outlying farms to the east of Middleford (Figure 28), as well as almost all of the buildings in town, at least those shown on the map, even though the Stuarts did not retain control of the mill operations (Figure 29). With declining profits from the mill-related industries, non-company homeowners were apparently moving away. The lack of income into the hands of individual families was also reflected in the declining number of residential structures in Middleford. With no money to live, these families would have had a hard enough time to provide food on the table, let alone have enough cash to build a new house. Therefore, the total number of houses in town, also declined in the latter half of the 19th century.

Figure 28: Plat from Baist's Atlas (1868) depicting only two main roads and streets in Middleford with lands of the Rawlins and Stuart families around the community.

As the milling era in Middleford was coming to a close, the Rawlins family members sold the mill land and lots in Middleford. An 1895 United States atlas listed Middleford as having a population of only 27, with a post office, but no railroad or express office (website livgenmi.com/1895). By 1900, most of the houses of the village were not depicted on a town

plat (Figure 30). The Rawlins heirs had just sold the gristmill and other buildings with 114 acres of land to Robert Purvis in 1900, many years after the Rawlins brothers had died and the mills were shut down (SCDB 135:85). A 1904 gazetteer for Delaware listed Middleford as simply a post village in Sussex County on Nanticoke River without reference to mills or other industry (Gannett 1976:12). Only one house was shown on a plat of the community in 1908 (Figure 31).

In 1908, the same year that Figure 31 (above) was drafted, the town of Middleford was described as being a small hamlet in Seaford Hundred, only containing a half dozen houses still

standing from its peak days in the mid-19th century, all showing signs of decay (Conrad 1908:709). The number of buildings that Conrad described roughly corresponds with the number of pre-1900 buildings observed in 2001 during the preparation of this report. The Middleford population had dropped from 444 in 1840 to just under 60 in the surrounding area by 1900. Correspondingly, the number of households dropped from 44 in 1860 to a dozen in 1900.

The 1915 USGS Seaford Quadrangle map for the area illustrated 18 structures in the Middleford community, which could represent a construction “boom” (Figure 32). Even though the milling operations had ceased, the area was becoming a satellite community for the fast-growing town of Seaford just a few miles to the south. As previously stated, few pre-1900s houses exist in Middleford today, but the community is still as it has apparently always been: a small village next to an active creek, covered with trees and off the beaten path.

The oldest business structure still standing in Middleford in 2001 is the old stock printing store (Figure 33). Previously located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Old Furnace and Middleford roads, the building was moved a few hundred feet north and put up on cinder blocks when the highway was widened. The majority of Middleford contains post-1900 houses with only a few isolated late 19th century dwellings.



Figure 33: Old stock printing store in Middleford.

The Town and Regional Residents:

As stated earlier, the number of residents in the region at the time Middleford was formally founded in 1805 is unknown, but the 1810 Federal Population Census indicated that at least 88 people were considered residents of the Middleford area. Few professions of these early Middleford residents were listed, however the community could boast a blacksmith, two house carpenters and joiner, ship carpenter, and ship captain among the first residents (Table 2). The fact that two house carpenters and a joiner were some of the earlier residents of the village could possibly attest to the early construction of the mill and related businesses or residences.

Name	Occupation
Oney, Daniel (free person of color)	Unknown
Needham, Michael	Unknown
Ellingsworth, William	House carpenter
Dulaney, William Jr.	House carpenter & joiner
Hudson, Daniel	Blacksmith
Dulaney, William Jr.	Unknown
Carey, Mitchell	Unknown
Trimbal, Daniel	Unknown
Short, Isaac	Unknown
Rawlins, Lot	Unknown
Elliot, Hooper	Ship carpenter
Stuart (Stewart), William	Unknown

Between 1805 and 1900, the community contained the following professions:

- One of each a Captain, bricklayer, carriage maker, carriage trader, doctor/physician, domestic servant, post master, preacher, railroad bridge operator, school teacher, ship carpenter, shoemaker, teamster, wheelwright, and gristmill laborer.
- Two of each a boarder, house joiner, grocery merchant, clerk, coach trimmer, cook, miller, woodcutter, and sawyer.
- Also blacksmiths (3), carpenters (6), servants (6), coopers (3), day laborers (4), laborers (5), lumber mill workers (3), with the majority of the residents mariners (21), farm laborers (24) and farmers (32).

The shift away from a mill-based economy to a farm-based economy can be traced through the occupations mentioned in the census. Coopers, mariners/sailors, and carpenters/joiners that might have been directly associated with the mill operations were plentiful in the 1850 census, but declined to almost extinction by 1880. On the other hand, farm related jobs increased dramatically from 1850 to 1860, declining but still with a strong presence in the 1880 census. The loss of mariners/sailors was probably in direct relationship to the construction of the railroad in 1858, which bypassed Middleford, causing the transportation down the Nanticoke River to become cost prohibitive. The loss of regular laborers, as opposed to farm laborers, could be the drop in production at the mill operations. The decline in the number of servants from 1850 to 1880 and the rise of the number of those keeping house might be a change in the use of the two terms, but more than likely is a reflection of the number of people that could not afford to pay servants as opposed to having the wives keep house. The 1900 census cannot be used for an accurate comparisons on local occupations since so few people lived in the town at that time.

Table 3: Middleford occupations from 1850-1880.

Occupation	1850	1860	1880
coopers	3	0	0
carpenters/joiners	5	3	1
mariners/sailors	19	6	2
servants	11	14	1
farmers	6	20	7
laborer	3	4	0
farm laborers	0	7	4
keeping house	3	7	25

The tax records for Sussex County did not indicate location of residents, which had to be compiled from census information. All heads of households were taxed on the same rates, regardless of race. Each head was taxed at \$134 from 1807-1850, with a few well-to-do families being taxed at a rate of \$150 per head of family. The tax records also contained information on pigs, sows, horses, colts, shoats, sheep, and ounces of silver plate, at a constant rate of \$1.10 per ounce from 1807 to 1850 (SCTA 1807-1850 passim). Only seven households were reported in the 1807 tax assessments, the first documents revealing detailed information on the Middleford residents, and only 11 households were reported in 1809.

Table 4: Population analysis of Middleford from 1807-1900.

Source	Free Person of Color	Slaves in households	White	Mulatto	Total households	Total population
1807 Tax households	1	2	6	n/a	7	
1809 Tax households	3	4	8	n/a	11	
1810 census households	1	n/a	17	n/a	18	88
1813 Tax households	5	3	4	n/a	9	
1816 Tax households	9	21	21	n/a	30	
1820 census households	7	n/a	21	n/a	28	155
1822 Tax households	9	19	15	n/a	24	
1827 Tax households	6	n/a	8	n/a	14	
1830 census households	4	n/a	18	n/a	22	131(Seaford had 417)
1833 Tax households	6	20	32	n/a	37	
1836 Tax households	3	11	30	n/a	33	
1840 census households	13	n/a	34	1	47	444
1840 Tax households	5	14	36	n/a	41	
1844 Tax households	1	23	28	n/a	29	
1848 Tax households (partial)	n/a	n/a	6	n/a	6 (partial)	
1850 census (all)	47	21	142	11	42	221
1860 census (all)	67	42	177	27	44	313
1878-80 Tax households	9	n/a	19	7	35	
1880 census	29	n/a	86	28	26	143
1900 census	7	n/a	40	10	12	57

Almost 100% of the people living in Middleford by 1850 were born in Delaware as observed in the 1850-1880 Federal Population Censuses. Previous censuses did not list place of origin, and cannot be used for comparative data. However, records do indicate that a very few of the earlier Middleford residents were from Maryland, such as John Ellegood (Allegood). From 1805 to 1900, only 11 people out of the total of 886 in the Middleford community were from outside Delaware; eight were from Maryland, and one each from Virginia, North Carolina, and Ireland.

Determining the exact number of residents in Middleford at any given time was problematic. Federal Population Censuses did not list detailed information on the populace until 1850. Therefore, residents listed as being from Middleford in 1850 were traced back into the previous censuses for data compilation. The state tax assessment records provided very detailed information on slaves, including names, ages, and values, but only gave names of heads of each household not family members. The Middleford Post Office address was used for 278 people as an address in the 1860 Federal Population Census, but when the local outlying farms and slaves were added, the total population was calculated to be 313 (Leonard n.d.:134-135). Down from a population of 444 in 1840, Middleford was starting a long decline in population. A rebound of population by 1860 indicate the mills were up and running, but that was not enough to keep the momentum of the growth of the town intact (Table 4). The number of houses in town illustrated on plat maps increased slightly because the placement of structures on maps was not contingent on paying for the promotion of the lots, but the total number of residents was on the decline.

A few of the censuses stated “Middleford” in the margins or in the page header, providing the number of people considered to be a part of the community, but many of those listed as “Middleford” residents may have been farmers in the local region, using the local post office, giving rise to the discrepancies in Table 4 between the post office figures of 1840 and 1860 and the census records. For example, the Jacob Kinder Senior family did not actually live in the town limits of Middleford, but lived nearby by for many years (Kinder 1978:15-16). They appear in the tax and census records as being in or near Middleford and were included for comparative analysis. Jacob Kinder Senior was the grandson of immigrants from Holland, who first settled in Pennsylvania and moved to the Deep Creek Furnace area by the 1760s, when Jonathan Vaughan built the first forge (Kinder 1978:15).

The history of Middleford also contained a story of “local boy does good” in the story of the rise Lot Rawlins. A descendant of Lot Rawlins (Lot’s son James’ grandson), Dr. John C. Rawlins of Seaford, Delaware, has been instrumental in gathering personal information of the Rawlins line. Lot’s father, Charles Rawlins, was born in England in 1749 (personal conversation with Dr. John Rawlins, October 5, 2001). He came to the New World in the late 18th century and he and wife had six children. Lot served for a short time in the Delaware Militia during the War of 1812 (Rollins 1985:286). Lot’s siblings all moved to the Georgetown, Kentucky region around 1810, where many of the next generation attended Georgetown College, becoming physicians. It is not known if Lot went to Kentucky, if even for a short period of time.

Lot purchased his first lot in the twelve-year-old town of Middleford in 1817, when he was 30 years old, starting with only \$50 (Rollins 1985:286). His occupation for the first 25-30 years is unclear, but by the 1840s, he had become a prosperous merchant and businessman. He

was able to buy many of the town lots and mills in 1846. Lot married Eliza Twiford (Twyford). After she died, he married Ann Brown, who died in 1846. Lot married a third time, to Mrs. Mary A James, who survived him (Rollins 1985:286). Lot had seven children: Mary Ann, William, John Morgan, James, Charles A., Thomas, and Phillip Henry. Lot adopted his grandson Henry White Baker, the only child of his only daughter Mary Ann, and raised him as his own child (Rollins 1985:287). By the time of Lot's death, he owned over 2000 acres and most of Middleford and the Merchant Mills, located at the head of the tidewater of the Nanticoke River. He was a very kind and eccentric man, noted for a singular impediment of speech (Rollins 1985:287). Lot never used tobacco, drank no alcohol, and never wore a pair of boots. John M. and James Rawlins took over the milling business by Lot's death in 1861 and operated it until the early 1900s (Figure 34). The Rawlins family also donated land in Middleford for the use of a park (personal conversation with Dr. John C. Rawlins, October 5, 2001).

MIDDLEFORD, Sussex Co.
 Pop. 100—Banking Town Seaford

1	Brown Jas. H. (near).....	Farmer.	H 3
2	Hill D. C.....	Farmer.	
3	Rawlins James.....	Grist & Planing	
4		Mills & G. S.	G 3
5	Rawlins Wm.....	Wool Carding.	K 3

CAPITAL.		KEY -		CREDIT.	
Left-Hand Column.				Right-Hand Column.	
AA	\$1,000,000 or over.			A1 Unlimited.
A+	750,000 or over.				
A	500,000 to \$750,000				
B+	300,000 to 500,000	1	}		High.
B	150,000 to 300,000	1½			
C	75,000 to 150,000				
D	40,000 to 75,000				
E	20,000 to 40,000	2	}		Good.
F	10,000 to 20,000	2½			
G	5,000 to 10,000				
H	2,000 to 5,000				
K	1,000 to 2,000	3	}		Fair.
L	— to 1,000	3½			

The absence of a Rating indicates those whose business and investments render it difficult to rate them satisfactorily to ourselves. We therefore prefer, in justice to these, to give our detailed report on Record at our offices.

Figure 34: Flyer from the Mercantile Agency of RG Dun & Co. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on November 11, 1880, providing a list of merchants, traders, etc. in Middleford.

James Rawlins, Lot's son, lived in the house that is currently the second house south of the intersection of Old Furnace and Middleford roads on the west side of the highway (Figure 35). The foundation was constructed with hewn logs and twigs in the plaster/mortar (personal communication with Dr. John C. Rawlins on October 5, 2001).



Figure 35: House formerly belonging to James Rawlins, Lot's son.

The African American community of Middleford

An increasing number of free person of color individuals and families lived in the Northwest Fork Hundred region of Delaware prior to the establishment of Middleford in 1805. John Parsons and Jacob Price, a “Mollater” man, were the only two free African Americans listed for Northwest Fork Hundred around 1780 (DPA 2001a:6). In 1790, Beavons on Cannon, Jacob of James Brown, Jack of William Brown, Jack Clows, and Jack Roach were listed as free African Americans of the same hundred (DPA 2001a:14). By 1800, 25 free blacks were listed in Northwest Fork Hundred, including two females (DPA 2001b:45-46). However, the records do not include details that would place any of these individuals in the pre-Middleford community.

Daniel Oney, a free person of color, was the first person to be directly associated with the town of Middleford, purchasing the first lot there in 1806. Oney lived in Middleford at least into the 1840s, but was not listed on the 1850 census for the state, presumably having died by then. It is not known if Mr. Oney was a former slave. Another free person of color, Ephraim Oney, lived in Middleford from at least 1830 to the 1850s, and is presumed to be related to Daniel. In the 1830 Federal Population Census, Daniel Oney had five free persons of color in his house and Ephraim had four. Ephraim died in 1855 and Lot Rawlins, the Administrator of his estate found no goods or chattels or debt in his name (SCPR for Ephraim Oney 1855).

The Middleford community may have been developing into a small haven for free Blacks in the first half of the 19th century. Consistently from 1810 to 1860, Middleford had a higher than state average of free African Americans. From 1810 to 1840, free persons of color comprised between 25 to 39 % of the total population of Middleford, with slaves only

comprising 6 to 15 % of the total town population. The Delaware state ratio for free Blacks in 1850 was 19.7 %, compared to 38% in Middleford, however, the state ratio of slaves to the total population was 2.1% compared to 9% in Middleford. The ratio of males versus females in both the slave and free Black populations was relatively equal. The free white population was fairly evenly distributed between each gender, comprising between 53 to 66 % of the total local population during the antebellum period. The Middleford community consisted of 39% free persons of color compared to the state average of 17.8% for the year 1820 (Bureau of the Census 1909:82). The village also contained 8% slaves compared to the state average of 6.2% for the same year. As a whole, in 1820, Delaware's slave population was 4,509, half that of the total for the state in 1790, and by 1860, the number was 1,798 (Bureau of the Census 1909:133). The trend indicated Delaware's shift away from a slave based economy to free labor.

Table 5: Population statistics for Middleford from 1810 to 1840.

YEAR	Free white males	Free white females	Free black, mulatto males	Free black, mulatto females	Black male slaves	Black female slaves	Total population
1810	29 (33%)	19 (22%)	27 (31%) both genders		13 all (15%) both genders		88
1820	40 (26%)	42 (27%)	26 (17%)	35 (22%)	5 (3%)	7 (5%)	155
1830	40 (31%)	46 (35%)	18 (14%)	15 (11%)	5 (4%)	7 (5%)	131
1840	154 (35%)	129 (29%)	66 (15%)	67 (15%)	19 (4%)	9 (2%)	444
1850	83 (38%)	59 (27%)	30 (14%)	53 (24%)	14 (6%)	7 (3%)	221
1860	90 (28%)	87 (28%)	52 (16%)	42 (12%)	23 (7%)	19 (6%)	313
1880	44 (31%)	42 (30%)	31 (21%)	26 (18%)	n/a	n/a	143
1900	21 (36%)	19 (34%)	11 (19%)	6 (11%)	n/a	n/a	57

Records indicate former slaves that were manumitted in the region stayed in the area after being freed. Some slaves had some means of financial support, perhaps from performing work for hire to nearby landowners or businessmen. Isaac Green, a slave of Sally Moore (widow of George Moore) purchased his freedom for an undisclosed amount and was freed in Middleford under the direction of William and James Huffington on September 26, 1807 (SCDB AG30:334-335). Green was then allowed to "act and transact business as is customary for free men to do in all lawful leases". Isaac Green then purchased a 20-year-old woman named Pacy from Elizabeth Laurence, who made the transaction on behalf of Richard Laurence (probably her husband) on October 9, 1809 for 50 pounds (SCDB AG30:334-335). Although the transaction only lists an exchange of money, no terminology regarding her freedom was in the document. Apparently, Isaac granted her freedom. It is probable that Isaac was married to Pacy.

Isaac Green appeared in the Sussex County tax assessments in 1809 and 1813, having just a horse by the latter assessment, and was listed on the 1810 and 1820 Federal Population Census. In 1810, Isaac had only one other female free person of color living with him, probably Pacy. In 1820, he had one male between 1-14 years old, one female between 1-14 years old, two females between 14-26 years old, and one female between 26-45 years old (probably Pacy), all of which were free persons of color. After 1820, Isaac Green disappeared from the archival record in the Middleford area.

Many slave owners apparently grappled with the moral dilemma of owning slaves, leading to the release of many slaves by manumission when the owner was still alive, but mainly after the death of the owner. Delaware had a strong manumission movement, a result of the combination of certain political, religious, and economic forces (Williams 1996:xii). The terminology of contemporary manumission papers reflected the mood of many businessmen. Isaac Short, another Middleford lot owner, released a slave named Hector in 1807:

Manumission Negro Hector from Isaac Short, Sussex County, State of Delaware: Know all men by these presents that I Isaac Short of the County and State aforesaid being Conscious to myself that the holding my fellow men in perpetual slavery is contrary to the laws of God and the unalienable right of mankind therefore for these Good Causes and Weighty Considerations of the said Isaac Short for myself, heirs, and assigns forever, doth hereby discharge and let free my Negro Man Hector ... (SCDB AC26:202-203).

Another slave owner stated that enslaving his fellow man was contrary to “every principal of the late Glorious Revolution that has taken place in America...” (SCDB AC26:203). Some slaves were giving “contracts” similar to indentured servants in the 17th and 18th century. After time served, they could be granted their freedom. William Huffington purchased Stephen Dredden from Ephraim Tull for a period of five years and then he was to be released. However, Huffington died and his brother Edward and father William Senior released Dredden after “faithfully” serving his five years (SCDB AK33:132). The Isaac Dredden household, a mulatto family represented in the 1880, could be descendants

Still, some Middleford residents retained slaves, even though many neighbors were granting them their freedom. In the 1809 Sussex County Tax Assessment for Northwest Fork Hundred, William Huffington, Jr., the main owner of the Middleford Mills, was listed as owning:

- a Negro named Linus aged 40 (\$80),
- Anthony aged 16 (\$80),
- Tura aged 17 (\$60),
- 5 acres of ground improved in Middleford,
- 55 acres (\$1 acre for \$52),
- 2 horses (\$100),
- 2 yoke and oxen ((\$60),
- 2 cows and calves (\$14),
- 1 sow and pigs (\$3), and
- 61 silver plates (\$67).

In the 1813 Sussex County Tax Assessment for Northwest Fork Hundred, William Dulaney Jr. was listed as owning:

- 1 Negro woman named Rose aged 35 (\$60),
- 1 minor girl aged 11 (\$30),
- 1 minor boy aged 9 (\$30),
- 2 horses (\$100),
- 1 cow and calf (\$8),
- 1 yearling (4\$),
- 7 shoats (\$4), and

- 1 yoke of steers (\$30) (1813 Northwest Fork Hundred, Sussex County, Tax Assessment)

The African Americans that resided in Middleford from 1807 to the Civil War, and to 1900 in the community had a variety of occupations. There was a blacksmith, bricklayer, cook, and some coopers (2), as well as day laborers (5), farm laborers (8), a farmer, those keeping house (3), mariners (6), servants (14), a woodcutter, and a teamster. People listed as mulatto for the same time period had the following occupations: cook (1), farm laborer (2), farmer (4), lumber mill worker (1), keeping house (6), mariners (3), sawyer (1), servant (1), and woodcutter (1). Free persons of color, like most people, tended to settle where they could find the best work. In Sussex County, the best place for work was in the smaller, rural communities, compared to New Castle County, where a higher percentage lived in the cities (Williams 1996:186). What made African Americans stay in the community after they were released from slavery? Some family members may have still been in bondage nearby. Some people may have not had enough money to move. Other people may have had a good job and did not want to leave. One of the oldest residents, Rachel Turner, who was listed in the 1880 Federal Population Census for Middleford as a 114-year-old African American, was born in 1766.

Elijah Collins, a cooper, lived in Middleford in the 1840s, and his son Jeremiah was a mariner (Federal Population Census 1850). The elder Collins was a free person of color, and moved to Seaford where he died in the mid-1850s. A sale bill posted by the Orphans Court in 1854 ensured that the public was aware of his race for the purposes of the transaction (Figure 36; SCOC Case File for Elijah Collins 1854). The bill also indicated that James Stuart, a son of either William or Michael Stuart, was the court clerk for Sussex County.

Just as Isaac Green stayed in the area after being released from slavery, so did Purnel Stuart, a former slave of the Michael Stuart, one of the owners of the Middleford Mills in the 1830s and 1840s. Purnel lived in the community as a slave from at least 1833 to the 1840s. He was first mentioned in the 1833 tax assessment as being a 10-year-old male worth \$40 (SCTA 1833). Purnel's value appreciated for the Stuart's to \$95 in 1840, and to \$100 in 1844. Purnel was manumitted prior to 1850 and appeared in the 1850 Federal population Census as a single, free person of color, living by himself. Also, appearing in the 1860 and 1880 census, Purnel was listed as being taxed only on his person at \$150 in the 1878-1880 tax records. Purnel apparently never married and disappeared from the records after 1880. Purnel assumed the name of his previous owner when released from slavery. There were a significant number of free African Americans in the community prior to the Civil War as well as all African Americans after the war, yet it is difficult to trace these individuals through the transition from slavery to freedom. While many of the slaves retained their owners' surname after being freed, many chose other surnames (Matheson n.d.:5).

Orphans' Court Sale.

By Virtue of an Order of the Orphans' Court,
For Sussex County, in the State of Delaware,
Will be exposed to Sale, at Public Auction,
On Friday, the 26th of January,
next, at 2 o'clock, P. M., at the Union Hotel of Thomas W. Dawson, in Seaford, North-
West Fork Hundred and County aforesaid,



A HOUSE AND LOT,

Situated in the Village of Seaford, in North-West Fork Hundred and County aforesaid, adjoining lands of Capt. Benjamin Stockley and others, containing, 17 and 76.100 perches, more or less, with the improvements and appurtenances; being the real estate of **ELIJAH COLLINS**, (negro,) deceased.

And it is Ordered by the Court, That the purchaser or purchasers be and appear at the next Orphans' Court, of Sussex County, that the Court may assign the land and premises sold to him, her or them, on his, her or their paying the purchase money to the parties entitled to the same, or entering into recognizance before the said Court with approved surety or sureties to pay the purchase money with interest, in such manner and time as the Court shall direct.

Attendance will be given, and the terms of sale made known, at the time and place aforesaid, by **JOHN R. McFEE**, Esq., Trustee appointed by the Court to effect said sale.

By Order of the Orphans' Court,
JAMES STUART, Clerk.

GEORGETOWN, Dec, 29, 1854.

Figure 36: Sale Bill for Elijah Collin, "Negro" for land in Seaford; Collins was a former resident of Middleford in the 1840s (SCOC Case File for Elijah Collins 1854).

Similar to the rest of Delaware, Middleford had a separate public school for African Americans at least until the mid-1920s (Figure 37). Presently, there are several African American families living in Middleford.

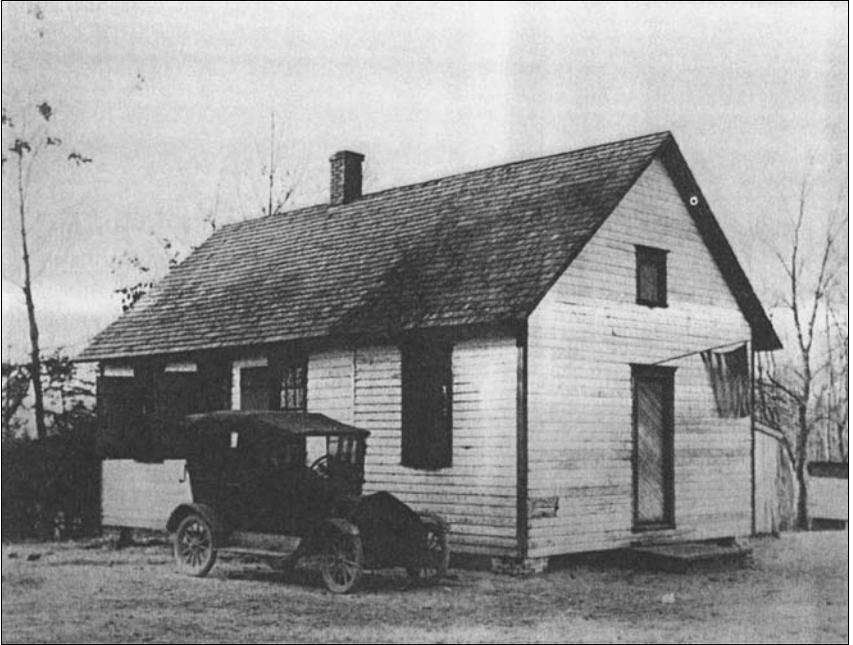


Figure 37: The Middleford School for persons of color in the mid-1920s (Skelcher 1999:70, 102).