

## Chapter 4

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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#### A. REGIONAL HISTORIC OVERVIEW

The project area is located in Cedar Creek Hundred, Sussex County, approximately two and one half miles southeast of Milford and approximately one and one half miles north of Cedar Creek. The land north of Cedar Creek was originally part of St. Jones County. When Kent and Sussex Counties were formed from St. Jones and Whorekill Counties in 1683, the Mispillion River was set as the boundary between the two new counties and the project area has lain firmly within Sussex County since that time (Scharf 1888:1200; Conrad 1908:693).

The earliest settlement in Cedar Creek Hundred was made in 1671 when Richard Perrott of Virginia patented a tract of 3,000 acres of land between Prime Hook and Slaughter Creeks (Scharf 1888:1247; Conrad 1908:693). Tracts within the vicinity of the project area were taken up in the early 1680s. In 1681 Robert Hart patented 436 acres called “Mount Holly” on the north side of Cedar Creek, in 1682 800 acres was granted to Henry Skidmore and in 1686 Thomas Skidmore and Thomas Williams were granted 970 acres (Hitchens 1976:34-35).

Cedar Creek, which flows eastward through Cedar Creek Hundred and empties into the Delaware River to the south of Mispillion Creek, was particularly important to the early settlement and industrial development of the region. Cedar Creek offered the best advantages for mill-seats, and more mills were built on this creek than any other watercourse in Cedar Creek Hundred (Scharf 1888:1253). Moreover, the creek was navigable as far as the “Brick Granary” which was located just south of the project area, near where modern SR 1 crosses Cedar Creek. The most

significant early settlement in the hundred, Cedar Creek Village, was situated just upstream from the Brick Granary. The village formed around Draper’s Mill, which was in operation by the early 18th century. At that time it contained several mills and over a dozen residences (Scharf 1888:1254; Conrad 1908:694). Thus before Milford was laid out on the Mispillion Creek, Cedar Creek supported the main settlement and was the primary shipping point for the entire region (Scharf 1888:1247).

The town of Milford, located in both Kent and Sussex Counties, is divided into northern and southern sections by Mispillion Creek. Like Cedar Creek, Mispillion Creek supported a number of mills, and the development of the milling industry spurred initial settlement. In 1787 the first mill was built in the vicinity of Milford and later that year land on the north side of Mispillion Creek was surveyed into town lots (Scharf 1888:1188, 1190). The forest surrounding Milford was known for the quality oak it produced and shipbuilding quickly became another important industry along the Mispillion. The shipbuilding industry was well established by the first quarter of the 19th century and in the 1880s there were at least three active shipyards in Milford (Scharf 1888:1190). By this time, most of the shipping and mercantile business in Cedar Creek Hundred had shifted from Cedar Creek to Milford and the Mispillion. In 1888, J. Thomas Scharf described Cedar Creek Village as “but the skeleton of its former self” (Scharf 1888:1254).

The construction of the Junction and Breakwater Railroad in 1859 also encouraged the shift in industry and commerce away from Cedar Creek and towards Milford. Whereas some of the earliest roads in Cedar Creek Hundred crossed the current project

area, the Junction and Breakwater Railroad entered the Hundred at Milford and crossed the Hundred to the west of the project area by way of Lincoln and Ellendale. The railroad was completed to its terminus in Rehoboth in 1869 and thus provided a direct connection from Dover to the Atlantic. In 1883, the railroad became part of the Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Railroad (Beers 1868; Scharf 1888:379, 432; Wilson 1899:326).

Modern road improvements in the 20th century allowed for additional development in northern Sussex County. In the early 20th century the DuPont Highway (U.S. Route 113) was built through Sussex County roughly paralleling the Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Railroad. This new road allowed for vehicular access to points north. In the late 1970s SR1 was built through Sussex County. Within the project area, the new route was built along the existing alignment of State Route 14 with additional lanes added to the west of the existing road. With improved transportation infrastructure and ease of access to northern Delaware and the Atlantic Coast, northern Sussex County experienced residential and commercial suburban growth at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

## B. PROJECT AREA HISTORY

The current project area lies between the villages of Milford and Cedar Creek, which, as discussed above, were settled in the 18th century. Thus the current project area lies within an important early transportation corridor between the two towns. As early as 1734, a road that roughly followed the course of modern SR 30/Cedar Creek Road through the project area was laid out. Alexander Draper's will dated 1734, references his mills on the "county road at the head of Cedar Creek" (Sussex County Probate Files). "Draper's Mill," situated on Cedar Creek at Cedar Creek Village, was the earliest grist mill on that water-

way (Scharf 1888:1253). This "county road" may have been part of the old King's Road that connected Sussex County to points north. In 1812, the predecessor of modern SR 1 within the project area was formally laid out (Figure 4.1) and by 1850 Wilkins Road/Cedar Neck Road was in place (Figure 4.2). Though the courses of these early roads were widened and shifted in the 20th century, the modern alignment of the road network in the current project area was generally in place by the mid-19th century.

The SR 30/Cedar Neck Road/SR 1 intersection marks an early crossroads and at least one house sat near the project area in the late 18th or early 19th century. When the Sussex County Court of General Sessions ordered the road from Milford to the Brick Granary (the predecessor of modern SR 1) to be laid out in 1811, it was planned to intersect the old county road "at or near a place where negro Cudgo did live" (Sussex County Road Papers 1811). Today, this point is located near the intersection of SR 30 and SR 1 but no other evidence pointing toward the precise location of this former dwelling has been uncovered in the course of this research.

Published maps and atlases from the 19th and early 20th centuries (Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4) show three buildings within the project area. The W. Shockley House, which first appears on Beers' *Atlas of the State of Delaware* (Figure 4.3) sits on the eastern side of the road to Cedar Creek Village (the predecessor of modern SR 30) in an open field. This house had been removed by 1918 when a map published by the United States Geological Survey (Figure 4.4) shows a house standing just north of the site of the W. Shockley House. Built around the turn of the 20th century, this house is still standing in this location, just north of the proposed right-of-way.

William Shockley, Sr. had settled in Cedar Creek Hundred by the late 18th century and came to own several farms and mills in the area. During

the American Revolution, William Shockley was a staunch loyalist who opened his home to British soldiers and Tories. William and his wife Elizabeth had a son, William Shockley Jr. who was born on the home farm in 1806 as was William Jr.'s son, William Shockley III in 1827. More detailed research will be required to establish whether the W. Shockley house site that sits within the current project area is this home farm or another Shockley property (Reamy and Reamy 2007:247).

The R.H. Davis house is mapped on the 1868 and 1918 maps on the west side of SR 30 north of Wilkins Road, apparently beyond the proposed limits of construction. This area is now occupied by a housing development. Other land within the current project area was likely farmland and woodland associated with the houses or property of R.H. Davis, W. Shockley and the B. Watson Estate (see Figure 4.3).

This was certainly true in the case of the land of the B. Watson Estate at the southeast corner of modern Wilkins Road/Cedar Neck Road and SR 1. Records from the Kent County Court of Chancery describe this piece of land as containing "no improvements" in 1859 (Figure 4.5) (Kent County Court of Chancery Partition Docket D/16). In 1870 the Kent County Orphans Court described the same tract as "woodland" (Figure 4.6) (Kent County Orphans Court Dockets A2/410). In the mid-19th century this tract was owned by Curtis S. and Bethuel Watson who together owned the shipbuilding and mercantile firm of C.S. Watson and Company. The Watsons likely used this tract of woodland to supply timber for their shipbuilding business (Scharf 1888:1192).

The historic landscape of the project area remained otherwise largely unchanged until the mid-20th century when several houses were built on the southern side of Wilkins Road between SRs 30 and 1, and on the eastern side of SR 30. Between 1954 and 1961 a house was built at the southwest corner of what is now

Wilkins Road and SR 1. It was joined by a house at the southeast corner of SR 30 by 1968 and Wilkins Road and in the 1980s two other houses were built between the above-mentioned dwellings. Three houses on the east side of SR 30 were constructed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (United States Geological Survey 1954 [1982]; Delaware Data MIL).

In the late 20th century, the road network in the project area was altered. To accommodate the increased traffic traveling between northern Delaware and the Delaware Beaches, Delaware State Route 1 was constructed through southern Sussex County in the 1970s. Within the current project area, this road was built roughly along the alignment of the former State Route 14. The old two-lane State Route 14 became the northbound lane of the new SR 1 while a southbound lane was constructed to the west of the existing roadway (Figure 4.7). In the 1980s the section of SR 30 within the project area was abandoned and only a trace of the former road is visible on an aerial photograph from 1992 (Figure 4.8). By 2007, SR 30 had been reconstructed within the project area, running parallel to SR 1 and reconnecting to State Route 14 at the exit ramp from northbound SR 1. No significant changes were made to the alignment of Wilkins Road/Cedar Neck Road in the late 20th century.

### **C. ANTICIPATED HISTORIC PROPERTY TYPES**

The cartographic evidence indicates that the site of the W. Shockley homestead lies within the proposed alignment of Ramps A and B just east of SR 30. Depending on the date range of this property, archaeological remains of one or more houses, agricultural outbuildings, and landscaping features such as fences and roads are to be anticipated.

Research suggests that land use in the remainder of the project area has been predominantly agricultural or even “unimproved” until recently, with extensive areas being used for commercial timber production in the 19th century. While the latter land use may have been associated with processing facilities (e.g. saw-pits, lumber camps, and sawmills), direct evidence for the presence or location of such features is lacking. The absence of streams in the project area precludes the possibility of water-powered saw- or gristmills in the area. The documentary evidence for a late 18th/early 19th-century house occupied by an African-American at the northern end of the project area suggests that the presence of (probably) tenant or even squatter homesteads in the area cannot be discounted.