

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

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

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N-5201

Property Name: Retirement (James M. Vandergrift Farm, 1868)

Location and Verbal Boundary Description:

Retirement Farm is located on the east side of Route 13 approximately 1.8 miles south of its intersection with route 2. The nominated parcel includes a five acre rectangle beginning at the end of the lane approximately 500 yards east of route 13, extending east to the back of the farm yard, south to the headwaters of Augustine Creek, and north to the edge of the yard defined by its transition to cultivated fields. All structures within this area, except for the modern machine shed and cattle shed, are included in the nomination.

Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Claude Lester
P.O. Box 45
St. Georges, Delaware

Description:

The present house, built in the third quarter of the 19th century, replaced at least two earlier buildings located on this site. As it stands, Retirement is a two-and-a-half story, frame, gable roof, five-bay farmhouse. A two-story frame ell to the rear of the main block is original to the present house and was designed as a kitchen area. The overall dimensions of the house are 38 by 69 feet for the facade and the face of the ell. The house was originally covered with narrow face milled weatherboard finished with plain corner boards. Although this siding remains in situ it has been covered with aluminum siding since the house was first surveyed in 1977. The front of the building presented a balanced five-bay fenestration to the road, but with the residing the northern most opening was covered over. The house is laid out on a center-passage plan with a service ell and rests on a concrete stuccoed foundation defining a full cellar.

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The gabled roof is steeply pitched with a crossgable on the facade with three ridges and four valleys defining the roof. There are two brick chimneys with one offset to the south and the other offset to the east. Originally, the roof was wood shingled but it has recently been replaced and is now covered with tin.

The typical window is plain with single division sashes. For each of the three gables, there exists one semi-circular window. The head of these windows are half round forming an uninterrupted arc where it joins with the sides. On the rear extension of the building the windows are 6 over 6 light sash.

The main entrance is at the center of the facade with one door. The structural opening shape is flat with a plain applied horizontal and vertical trim. Above the door, there is a flat transom with two panes of glass.

The concrete steps extend to the first floor of the veranda and do not have a railing. They rise directly from ground level to the veranda. The veranda is open at the front and sides and it extends to the length of the entire facade. Furthermore, it is one-story in height and supported by six equally spaced posts with decorative scroll designs. They are attached from the post to the cornice.

On the south side of the house, an early porch has been closed and turned into a leanto shed.

The small barn in the back of the house is the oldest building that still exists on the farm which was built circa 1800. The barn is built of braced frame construction with mortise and tenon joints. The barn is rectangular with a steeply pitched roof. Doors are located at the east and west end of the barn. The wooden exterior has been covered by sheet metal while the roof is now covered by tin.

The granary was built around 1850 and is still in very good condition with much of the interior and exterior being original. It is two storys high, double cribbed with the doors facing north and south. It is also built of braced frame construction with mortise and tenon joints. A stone foundation supports the granary. The roof which is steeply pitched, is the only part that has been renovated and replaced with tin. Winder stairs lead from the wagon floor to the loft. The bottom stairway door made of board and batten construction is decorated with a leather figure of a man, approximately 3" tall and 2" wide; it is located on the upper center of the door. The man's arms and legs are extended and his face is grotesquely yet distinctively carved.

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The second barn was built at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a very large rectangular barn compared to the other buildings on the farm but on the otherhand, it is very similar in construction to the small barn and granary with frame construction, wooden beams and posts. The barn's facade is south. Two major additions are found on the barn. One is located in the rear and the other is on the eastern side which is used to house poultry and other farm animales. The barn has two silos. The first one is located on the northwestern end and the other silo is at the eastern addition.

Historical Background and Significance:

As reflected in the agricultural census returns of 1850, the James Vandegrift farm, Retirement, was slightly larger than most of its neighbors in terms of improved land. While the Vandegrifts were able to produce almost double the average amount of wheat, their corn crops fell slightly below average as did their investment in farm machinery and the value of their livestock. In most areas, such as the cash value of the farm and the amount of butter production, Retirement represents the average farm of the mid 19th century.

The Vandegrifts had owned and occupied the Retirement tract since the late 17th century and had kept it in agricultural use throughout the two centuries of their ownership. At one time they were involved in running a fulling mill adjacent to the headwaters of Augustine Creek, but the operation of this local industry seems to have been of relatively short duration.

What is most significant about the Retirement farmstead is the long term occupancy by a single family and how the steading developed under their stewardship. The simple frame later 19th-century vernacular farmhouse represents at least the third dwelling to stand on the site. The outbuildings behind the house also reflect long term usage. At the back of the lot is an English style barn raised on a principal post and swing beam framing system. The three bay barn is the last known example of its kind surviving in St. Georges Hundred and dates from the 1790 to 1820 period. Associated with the barn is a mid 19th-century granary of the type developed in the neighborhood in the second quarter of

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the 19th century. These granaries containing wagon bays and corn cribs on the ground floor and grain bins in the loft became a common sight on St. Georges Hundred farms by the 1850s when this particular example was erected. At a later date toward 1900 the first barn was replaced by a gable fronted hay barn and stable which still serves the farm.

The lack of pretentious outbuildings or an architecturally refined dwelling consolidate Retirement's significance as a middle level farm of the 19th century. Due to financial reverses suffered in the 1870s, the farm's economic position relative to its neighbors declined even as farm values plummeted across the board.

Nomination by Paul Cherry



RETIREMENT
N-5201



RETIRED LOT
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