

Site Name: Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm

CRS Number: K-3737

Location: South side of Route 10, Willow Grove Road
Wyoming vicinity
North Murderkill Hundred
Kent County, Delaware

Date of Fieldwork: October – November 1999

Type of Documentation: Level II: Partial Intensive
Annotated field notes (8 sheets)
Measured drawings--CAD (4 sheets)
Black and white 4" x 5" photographs (19)
Architectural data narrative

Threat: The Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm is threatened by the construction of a residential subdivision. The developer plans to demolish the barn and outbuildings, but has expressed the possibility of retaining the dwelling.

Significance: The Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm House stands today as an example of a finely detailed, mid-to-late eighteenth century rural dwelling. Although architectural evidence suggests that a member of Kent County's rural elite built the dwelling, the farm served from an early date as a tenant property. Outbuildings on the farm date primarily from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the du Pont family owned the property. The farm complex provides an excellent example of the use of agricultural tenancy as a strategy for generating income, particularly in its connection with the dairy industry.

Description: The du Pont Tenant Farm is located on the south side of Route 10, Willow Grove Road, southwest of Wyoming in Kent County, Delaware. The property includes a dwelling, dairy barn, chicken coop, and four sheds, and is surrounded by flat fields in a rural agricultural setting. The dwelling faces north towards Route 10, and is situated to the west side of a gravel lane that runs approximately 200 yards from the main road to the house. The lane continues

beyond the house, with the three sheds situated on either side of it, and terminates at the rear of the dairy barn.

Farm House. The main dwelling contains four separate construction periods, ranging from the last quarter of the eighteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. The initial period of construction, likely *circa* 1780, resulted in a brick hall-chamber-plan dwelling measuring 22 by 22 feet. Two-and-a-half stories high and three bays wide, the house had an interior end chimney in the west gable. The front (north) elevation is built in Flemish bond with a central door flanked by nine-over-nine-light sash windows. Only two windows, six-over-nine lights, pierce the second floor of this elevation. A shed-roofed porch covers the lower story. The porch has a concrete block foundation, tongue-in-groove ceiling, concrete steps at the east end, and square-cut wooden railings at the west end.

The west side of the Period I block is common bond brick, with two two-over-two-light sash windows in the gable, flanking the chimney. The rear (or south) elevation is also common bond brick, two bays wide, with nine-over-nine-light sash windows at the first story, and six-over-nine-light sash windows at the second story. The window at the east end of the first floor has been obscured by the one-story, shed-roofed porch addition. The east elevation of the Period I block is mostly obscured by the Period II addition.

The Period I block features a chambered hall plan. The front door opens into the hall, which measures 20 x 20 feet. Symmetrically placed windows flank the front door. The entire west wall of the hall is paneled, with a centrally placed fireplace. There is a built-in cupboard at the south end of the wall, featuring a curved back wall, arched door with fanlight, butterfly shelves, and carved trim. At the north end of the wall, a board and batten door opens into a boxed winder stair that leads to the second floor chamber. Three steps to the winder protrude into the room. The south wall of the hall originally featured two symmetrically placed windows. Due to the shed addition on the west side of the rear ell of the house, the window on the east end of the wall has been removed or blocked by drywall, and a door has been added to provide access to the porch addition. The east wall of this room features a door that leads to the second period addition. This door appears to be composed of two doors stuck together. The side that

faces the Period I room is fabricated from diagonally placed, tongue-in-groove boards with substantial metal straps and hinges. The board door is attached to a paneled wooden door.

The second floor room of the original brick structure, the 20 by 20 foot chamber, has been divided into two rooms by the insertion of a partition between the east and west walls. The west wall, running from the north to the south end, features a paneled door leading to a boxed winder stair to the attic, the landing for the winder stair from the first floor, a centrally-placed fireplace, and a door to a cedar-lined closet. Two steps to the attic winder protrude into the room. The west wall is completely paneled, and the door to the cedar closet is cut directly from the paneling. The symmetry of the original chamber has been upset by the partitioning of the room, which was done in order to create a landing area for both stair boxes separate from the living area of the chamber. The south wall of the landing (the added wall) has a paneled door that leads to the south chamber. A closet has been built along the full width of the east wall of the landing room, and two symmetrically placed windows pierce the north wall. Two symmetrically placed windows pierce the south wall of the chamber, and the east wall has a paneled door that leads to the second story of the Period II addition.

In the attic of the Period I block, there are 3 by 4 inch hewn rafters with pegged mortise-and-tenon joints. Some rafters have pegged collar ties. Hewn ceiling joists are also visible, spaced approximately 2 feet, 8 inches apart. A pair of small windows light the attic.

Periods II , III, and IV

At the east gable end of the Period I dwelling, there is a 19 by 15 feet, two-story, frame, two-bay, gable-roofed addition, which dates to the mid-nineteenth century. This addition has a lower roofline than that of the Period I block. A 19 by 19 feet, two-story, two-bay deep, gable-roofed ell at the rear (south) side of the Period II addition represents the third construction period, and was probably built in the late nineteenth or early-twentieth century. The main block, Period II addition and Period III ell have brick foundations and diamond-shaped asphalt-shingled roofs. The final construction period is represented by a 10-foot-deep, one-story, frame, shed-roofed enclosed porch that runs along the south and west sides of the ell. The porch features a concrete block foundation, asbestos shingle siding, and asphalt shingled roof. It was built in the mid-twentieth century.

The front (north) elevation of the Period II addition is two bays wide, with four-over-four-light sash windows at the first story and horizontally oriented three-over-three-light windows at the second story. The east elevation of the addition features a modern, asymmetrically placed one-over-one-light window at the first story, and two six-over-six-light sash windows symmetrically placed in the second story gable. The east elevation of the Period III ell features two symmetrically-placed bays, with a door and modern window on the first floor, and two six-over-six-light sash windows on the second floor. The first stories of the south and west elevations of the ell are covered by the one-story enclosed shed addition. There are two six-over-six-light windows at the south elevation, and two modern windows at the west elevation of the ell's second story.

The south side of the one-story porch addition features three sets of paired six-over-six-light windows. There is a modern storm door with a concrete stoop towards the west end of the south elevation. On the west side of the porch addition, there is a single six-over-six-light window towards the north end, and one pair of six-over-six-light windows at the south end.

The first floor of the Period II frame addition consists of a single room that measures 18 by 15 feet. A door leading to the rear ell opens through the south wall. The east wall, running from north to south, features a boxed winder stair to the second floor, a centrally placed fireplace, and a window.

The second floor of the Period II block originally consisted of a single room, the same dimensions as the first floor room. Two symmetrically placed windows pierce the north wall, and a door on the east wall leads to the Period I chamber. The west wall has two symmetrically placed windows, one lighting the stair. This room has been divided into three rooms: landing, bedroom/storage room, and bathroom. It is divided evenly from north to south by the insertion of a wall, separating the landing and bedroom/storage area. A door on the south wall of the bathroom leads to the rear ell.

The first floor of the rear ell consists of a single room, now used as the kitchen. The room is entered from the Period II addition by a door on the kitchen's north wall. The floor of the ell is lower than that of the Period II addition, and there is a single step down into the ell. An enclosed winder stair to the second floor of the ell is built against the north wall. A door leading

to the enclosed shed addition is on the east wall of the ell. There is a window and a door leading to a shed roofed porch on the west wall. The south wall of the ell has been removed, incorporating part of the enclosed shed addition into the kitchen space, enlarging the 18 by 15 foot room to approximately 18 by 26 feet. The shed addition features two sets of paired windows on its south wall, and one set of paired windows on its east wall.

The second story of the rear ell consists of a single room that measures 18 by 15 feet. The winder stair from the first floor, built against the north wall, opens directly into the room at its northwest corner. A door leading to the bathroom in the addition is also on the north wall. The east, south, and west walls are each symmetrically pierced by two windows. Ghost marks indicate that this room was at one time divided almost evenly from north to south by a partition wall.

As described before, the portion of the enclosed shed-roofed addition on the south side of the house has been incorporated into the kitchen ell. The portion of the shed at the west side of the ell is used as a laundry room measuring approximately 22 by 10 feet. A door at the north wall of the room leads into the hall of the Period I dwelling. A bathroom has been built into the northwest corner of the shed addition, and adjoins a small closet built into the west wall of the room. A door on the south wall leads out of the house into the backyard.

Outbuildings. A well and two sheds stand near the rear of the dwelling. The frame sheds appear to date to the late nineteenth or twentieth century. A third shed, located on the east side of the farm lane, may have originally served as a chicken house.

A large T-shaped gable-roofed dairy barn contained the bulk of the agricultural activity on the farm. Surrounded by a cement block wall that formed a work yard at the rear of the barn, the barn displays several generations of milking equipment along with stalls, grain storage, and a hayloft. A large machine shed stands to one side of the barnyard, and a cement block milk house extends from the front elevation of the barn.

History: The du Pont Tenant Farm has a long history of association with agricultural tenancy, beginning in the 1780s. From 1782 until 1968, the farm remained in the hands of John Banning and his descendants, who married into the Ridgely and du Pont families. The property attracted

a series of long-term tenants, including William Berry, Sarah Draper, John Patterson, Jr., and John B. Cleaver. The fortunes of the farm rose and fell several times over the nineteenth century, depending upon the amount of money and time the owner and tenant were willing to invest. Charles and Ann Ridgely du Pont, for example, who inherited the property in 1847, found that it was “now completely run down, and with deplorable buildings.” They invested more than \$6000 in new buildings and repairs to the existing ones. Based on this information and the tax assessments, it seems likely that the frame additions to the house were constructed between 1847 and 1860, along with the large T-shaped barn and a carriage house that is no longer standing.

Examination of the form and structure of the du Pont Tenant Farm House suggests that it was built in the late eighteenth century as a dwelling that permanently displayed an unidentified landowner’s wealth and accomplishment through the use of durable and well-crafted materials. In 1782, Thomas Collins and Garret Sipple sold the 400-acre property to Nehemiah Tilton and John Banning, a merchant in Dover. Banning died intestate in 1791. Banning owned seventeen properties at the time of his death, including four houses in Dover, one small farm, and twelve plantations of varied size. By law, his widow Elizabeth was entitled to one-third of his estate, with the rest to be held in trust for his minor children, Sarah and John. She appears to have remained in the family’s home in Dover; in 1794 she married William McKee, who served as guardian to her children.¹⁰ In 1797 Nehemiah Tilton sold his share of the 400-acre farm to McKee. McKee and the Banning children owned the farm jointly until 1807, when the entire property was transferred to Sarah Banning, now married to Henry Moore Ridgely.

Ridgely was member of a large and prominent Kent County family. He and his wife lived at various Ridgely family properties in Delaware, but never in the vicinity of Wyoming.¹¹ John Banning’s estate inventory suggests that the farm was rented to a tenant as early as the 1790s, and it was certainly occupied by tenant farmers by the first decades of the nineteenth century. Henry Ridgely, although he oversaw the operation of this farm and probably others as

¹⁰ William and Elizabeth McKee moved to Wilmington in the early years of the nineteenth century. Leon deValinger and Virginia Shaw, eds. *A Calendar of Ridgely Family Letters, 1742—1899, Vol. 2* (Dover, DE: Delaware Public Archives Commission, 1948) 65.

¹¹ deValinger and Shaw, Vol. 2, 20.

well, was primarily a lawyer and statesman (he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1810). While his correspondence indicates that he was occupied with matters concerning his farm properties, such as instructions for cultivation and sale of crops and management of tenants and rents, the du Pont farm seems to have been allowed to decline during his tenure.¹²

Although Henry Ridgely was responsible for its management, the property was still held in the name of his wife Sarah, who willed it to her daughter, Ann Ridgely du Pont, in 1841. Thus began the association of this property with the du Pont family, who would acquire the farm from the Ridgelys over a period of three generations by means of inheritance and retain it into the third quarter of the twentieth century. Ann's husband, Charles I. du Pont, assumed the management of and invested heavily in operations at his wife's farm following their marriage in 1841. Charles I. du Pont was a wealthy New Castle County industrialist, known for his operations of woolen mills on the Brandywine, his family connections to the Eleutheran Mills powder manufactory, and for his ancillary career as a scientific farmer. Du Pont lived at Louviers in northern New Castle County, so there is little doubt that this Kent County property was one of his tenant farms. At his death in 1869, du Pont was eulogized as a man who

“...gave considerable attention to agriculture and farming, and some of the most beautiful and valuable properties in our state attest at once to the practical skill and merited reward of his persevering toil and successful industry ...”¹³

Although du Pont is credited for introducing scientific methods of crop rotation and soil conservation to this particular farmstead, he is only one of a long line of landowners who cultivated this land through tenants. Correspondence between Anne and her brother that is summarized in the *Calendar of Ridgely Family Letters* details du Pont's efforts to revitalize the farm. In 1847, Ann wrote that her husband “has contracted for \$6,000 worth of work on the tract..., now completely run down, and with deplorable buildings.” In 1848, she “worries because Mr. du Pont, who requires only piety to make him ‘almost perfect’ invests so heavily” in the property “for her sake.” Another letter of that same year from Charles himself implies some

¹² deValinger and Shaw, Vol. 2, 77.

¹³ Memorial of Charles I. duPont, (Wilmington, DE: Henry Eckel, printer, 1869).

success with the investment, as he states that he “is pleased with the improvements” at the farm.¹⁴

Despite the fact that there is no documentary evidence to confirm this fact, it is possible that the mid-nineteenth century era of improvement at the farm fostered the construction of the frame additions on the east and south sides of the brick dwelling. At present, there is no physical evidence for this and structural elements that might aid in dating the structure are not exposed in this portion of the dwelling. Evidently, Charles I. du Pont’s improvements ensured the viability of the farm for generations to come, for the property was passed down within the du Pont family for several generations. Anne Ridgely du Pont bequeathed the property to her daughter Amelia in 1898, who then left it to her children, Anne, A. I., Amy, Julia, and Eugene II, in 1915. Eugene du Pont II purchased his siblings’ interest in the property in 1919 and passed it on to his son Eugene III, who sold it to the present owner, George Carroll, in 1968.¹⁵

¹⁴ deValinger and Shaw, Vol. 3, 106—113.

¹⁵ Kent County Recorder of Deeds, Book F25, page 304.

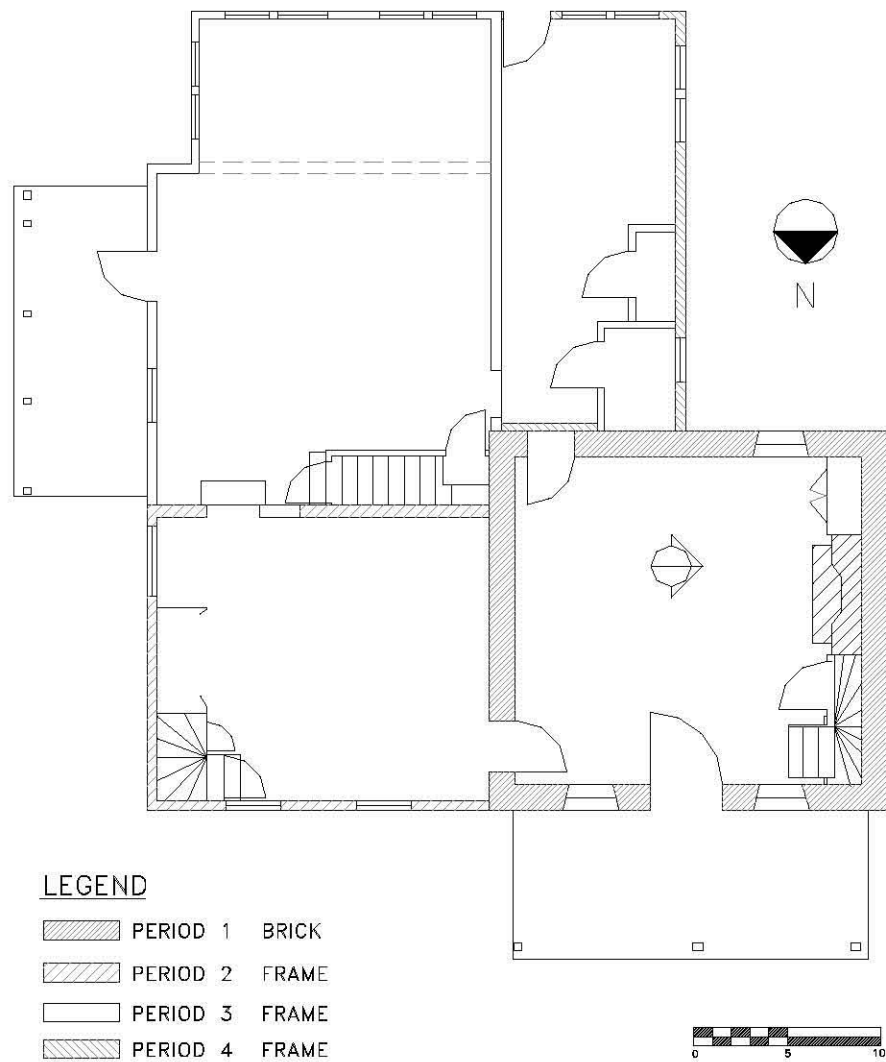


Figure 9: Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, first floor plan.

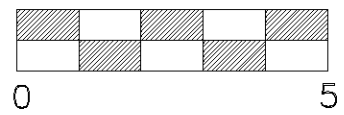
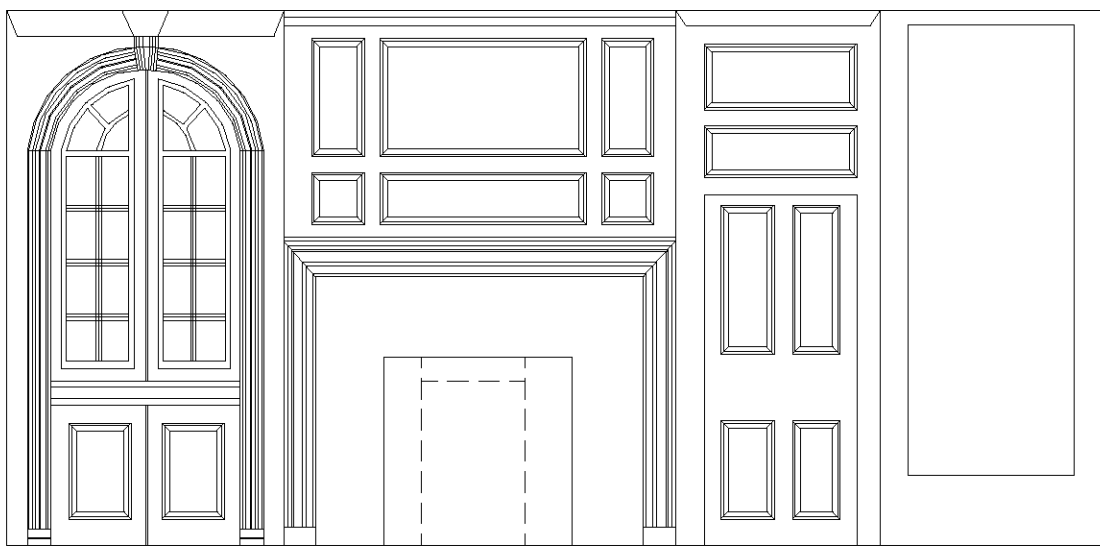


Figure 10: Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, Period I, paneling on west wall of first floor room.

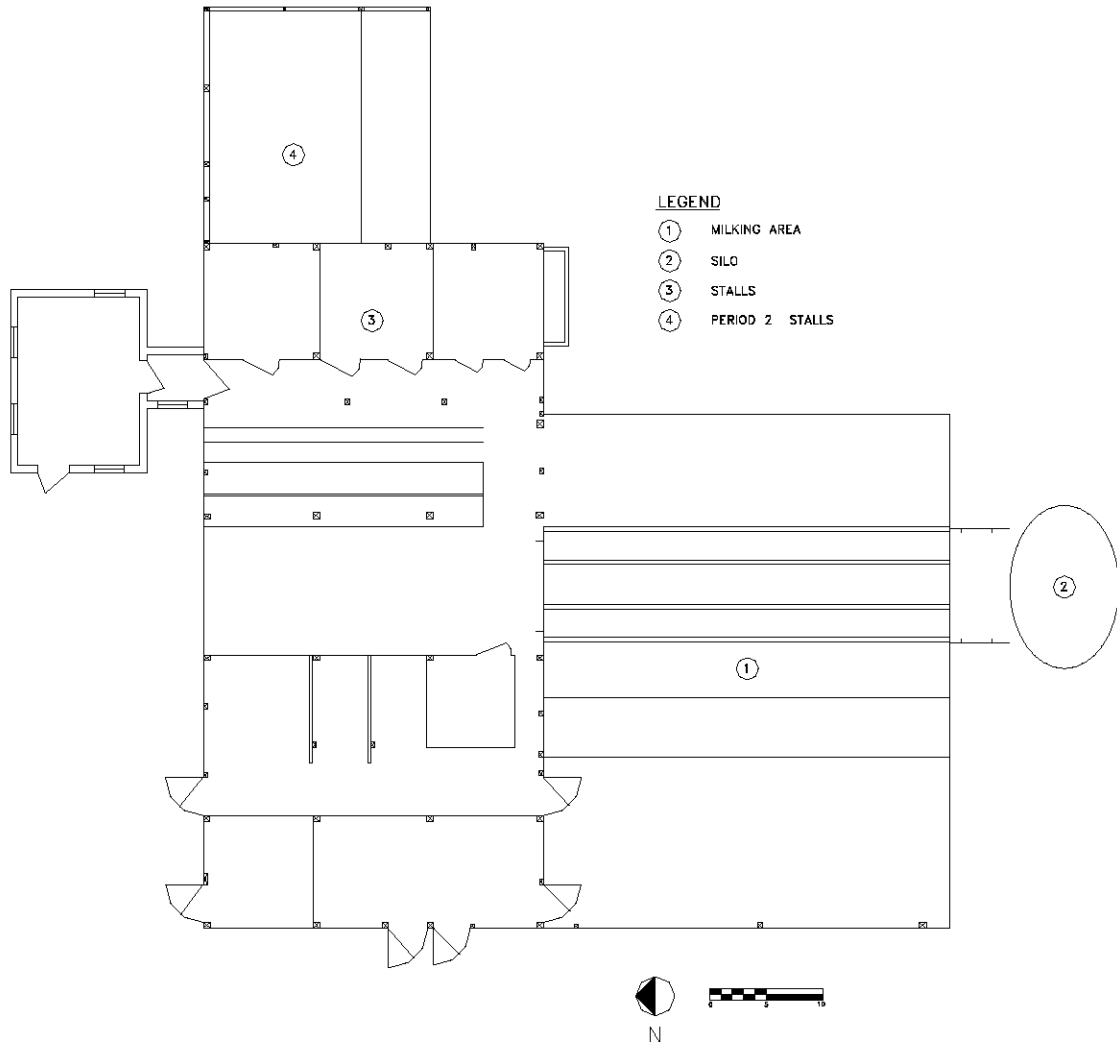


Figure 11: C. I. du Pont Farm, dairy barn, framing plan.

MID-ATLANTIC HISTORIC BUILDINGS SURVEY
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Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm
Route 10
Wyoming vicinity
North Murderkill Hundred
Kent County, Delaware

DE CRS No. K-3737

Photographer: David L. Ames

October-November 1999

Farm House

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- K-3737-2 Environmental view of dwelling, modern shed, and carriage shed looking northeast
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K-3737-13 Interior: second floor (Period I), view through door on east wall, looking northeast into the Period II section

Dairy Barn

K-3737-14 Perspective of the north and west elevations of the dairy barn and attached milkhouse looking southeast

K-3737-15 Perspective of the west and south elevations of the dairy barn and attached silo looking northeast

K-3737-16 Interior: second floor, showing framing looking southwest

K-3737-17 Interior: second floor, showing framing and hay machinery looking south

K-3737-18 Interior: first floor of south wing, showing stanchions looking south

K-3737-19 Interior: first floor of south wing, showing stanchions looking northeast



Figure 12: Charles I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, perspective of the north and west elevations looking southeast.



Figure 13: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, environmental view of dwelling, modern shed, and carriage shed, looking northeast.



Figure 14: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, view of the north elevation showing sycamore trees, looking south.



Figure 15: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, view of the north elevation looking south.



Figure 16: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, perspective of the west and south elevations, looking northeast.



Figure 17: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, detail of the west and south elevations of the Period I block showing juncture with rear additions.



Figure 18: C. I. du Pont Farm Tenant House, view of the south elevation looking north.



Figure 19: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, interior: first floor (Period I), view of the west wall looking west.



Figure 20: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, interior: first floor (Period I), detail of built-in cabinet showing butterfly shelves, looking west.



Figure 21: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, interior: second floor (Period I), view of south, west, and north walls looking northwest.

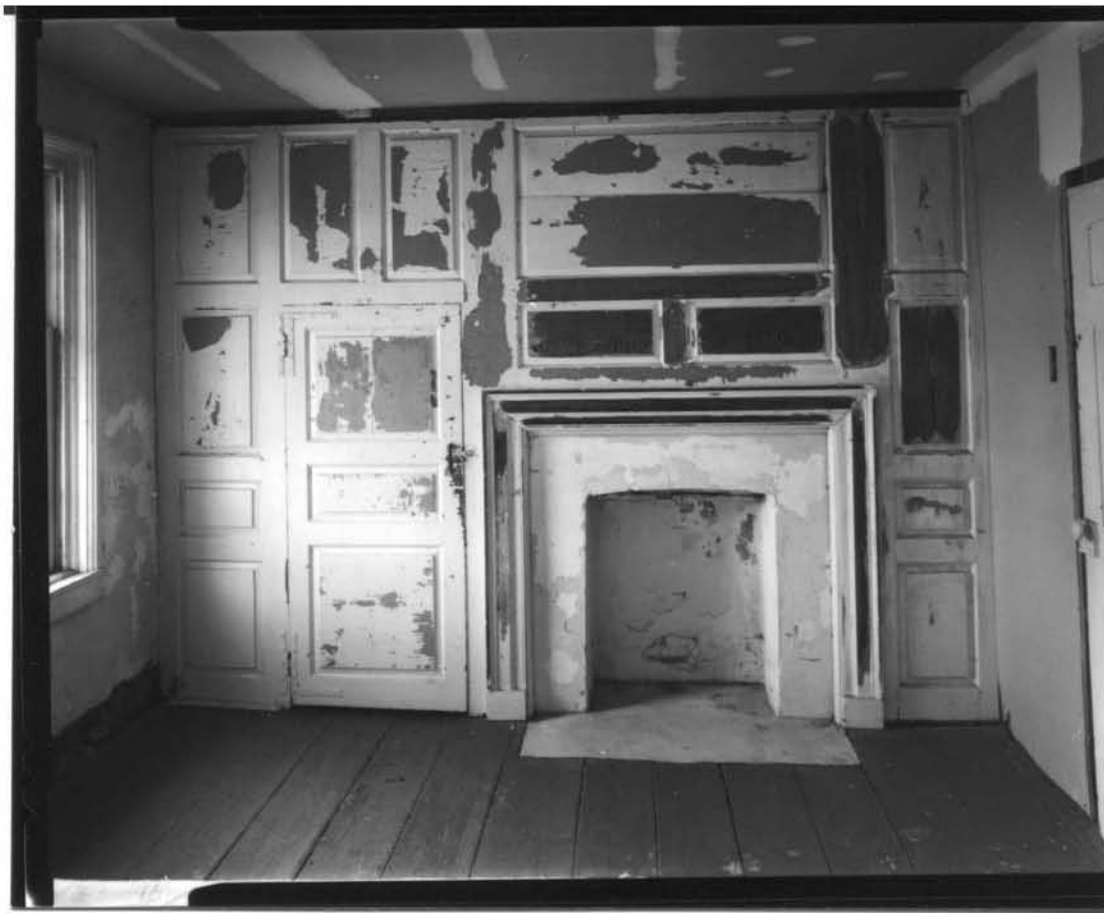


Figure 22: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, interior: second floor (Period I), view of the west wall looking west.



Figure 23: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, interior: second floor (Period I), detail of paneling on west wall looking northwest.



Figure 24: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm House, interior: second floor (Period I), view through door on east wall looking northeast into the Period II section.



Figure 25: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, perspective of the north and west elevations of the dairy barn and attached milkhouse looking southeast.



Figure 26: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, perspective of the west and south elevations of the dairy barn and attached silo looking northeast.



Figure 27: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, interior of dairy barn: second floor, showing framing looking southwest.

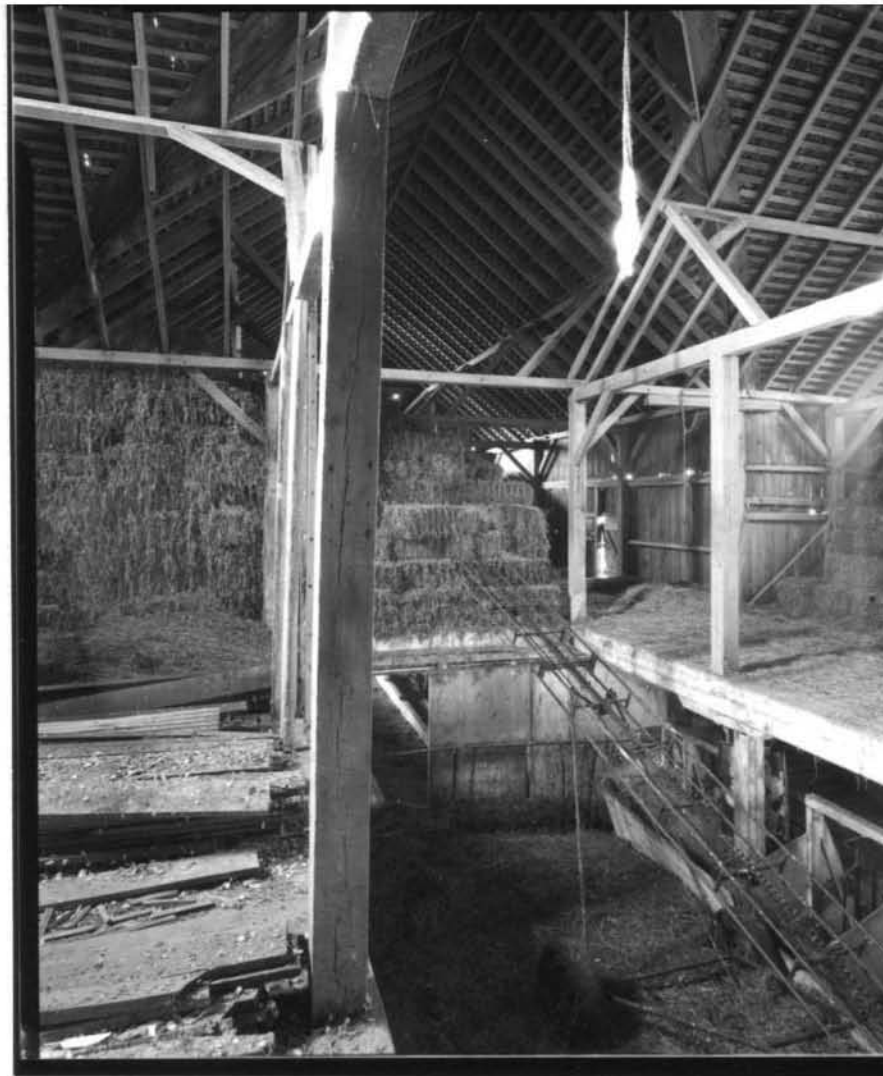


Figure 28: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, interior of dairy barn: second floor, showing framing and hay machinery looking south.

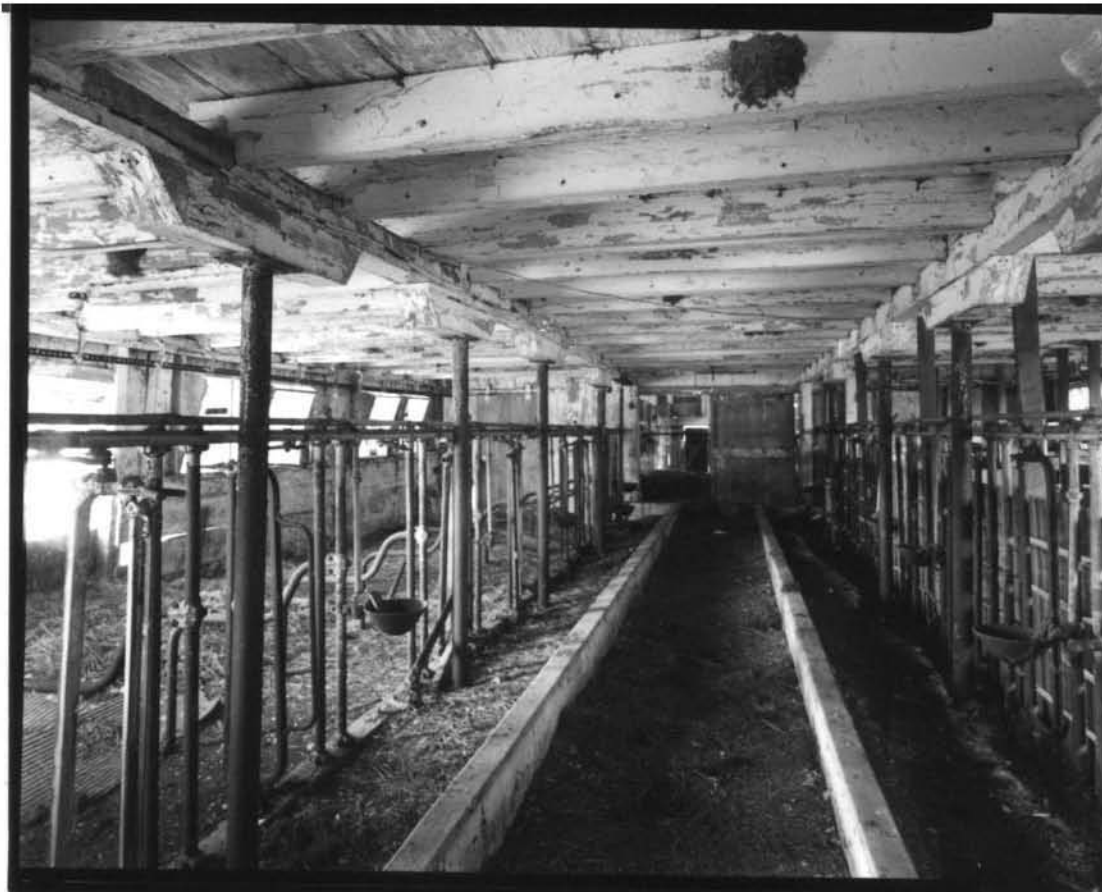


Figure 29: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, interior of south wing of dairy barn, showing stanchions looking south.

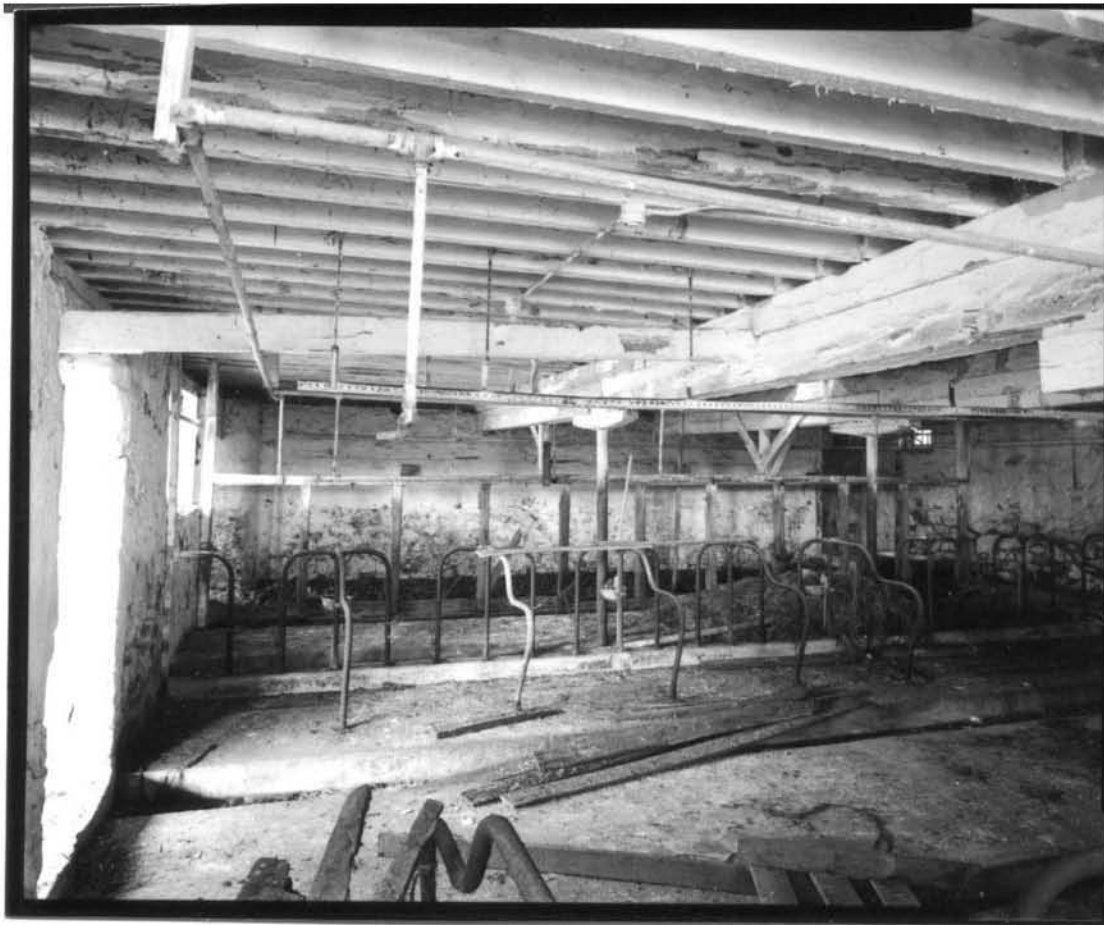


Figure 30: C. I. du Pont Tenant Farm, interior of south wing of dairy barn, showing stanchions looking northeast.