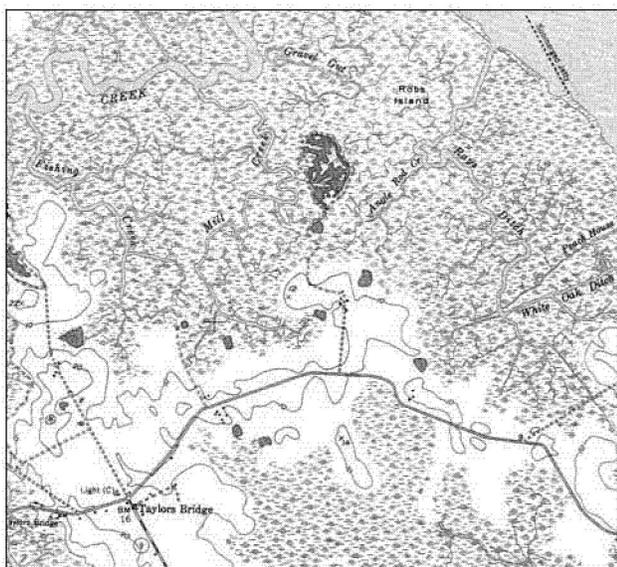


STAATS/DUKES FARM (N-4248)

279 Cedar Swamp Road
Taylors Bridge Vicinity
Blackbird Hundred



The Dukes Farm is located north of Cedar Swamp Road, approximately one mile east of Taylors Bridge in Blackbird Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware (Figure 1). The 420 acre farm is bounded by the estuaries of the Blackbird Creek to the west and north and by those of the Delaware River to the east. The farm complex lies at the end of an unpaved lane, circa 1500 feet north of Cedar Swamp Road. The complex consists of a farmhouse (A) and five outbuilding: a modern garage (B), a boat/machine shed (J) with an attached kennel (K), a granary/corn crib (I), a modern machine shed (D), and a dairy barn (F) with an attached sheep/machine shed (G).



The farm has been in the possession of the same family since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The first recorded owner of the property on the Cedar Swamp Road was Pieter Staats, who bought a parcel of land at sheriff's sale in 1730.¹ When Pieter Staats died, prior to 1757, his son and daughter, Abraham A. and Ann inherited the farm. Ownership of the farm was eventually conveyed to Abraham A. Staats.² The farm consisted of a large tract of both farm and marsh land along the Delaware River. On one of the creeks which ran through his property he built a tide water mill which he used as a saw mill, among other

functions. The "Tide Mill Farm" eventually passed to Abraham's son, Peter (1776-1826). Peter Staats married Jane Ryall, with whom he had ten children. Jane Ryall Staats died in 1826, after which Peter Staats married Jane Johnson Naudain, the widow of Robert Naudain, and then himself died intestate in July 1826. Since Peter failed to leave a will disposing of this property, it fell to the New Castle County Chancery Court to decide how to divide the real estate in response to a petition from William S. Deakyne, Staats' son-in-law.³ At the time of his death Peter Staats owned a total of six parcels: 1) 200 acres bounded by the lands of Gideon Emory, Peter Ecord, Francis McCreedy, and the heirs of James Smith; 2) 150 acres bounded by the lands of Thomas Deakyne, George Deakyne, the heirs of Francis Denny, and the heirs of Richard Taylor; 3) 80 acres of cedar swamp bounded by the lands of Joseph Kelly, the heirs of Andrew Naudain, and Arnold S. Naudain; 4) 200 acres of marsh land bounded by the Blackbird and Sherwood Creeks and the land of John Richardson; 5) one acre bounded by the lands of William Lockerman, the heirs of James Smith, and the heirs of Richard Rahows; 6) and one acre bounded by the lands of James Rogers, the heirs of William Johnson, and the devisees of Jacob Ryall. The Chancery Court appointed five neighbors—James Chambers, Arnold S. Naudain, William Weldon I, Henry Walker, and Michael Offley—to asses whether the property could be divided equally between all the heirs. In their opinion, the land could not be divided among all the heirs without "prejudicing and spoiling the whole." It could, however, be divided into two or more parts which would be advantageous to the heirs. A division of the property eventually took place in 1829.⁴

Mary Jane Staats received 108 acres; Veronica and William S. Deakyne received 170 acres; Emily and James Denny received 159 acres; Sarah and George Deakyne received 170 acres; Abraham Staats received 166 acres; and Isaac

L. Staats received 162 acres, which comprised the “Tide Mill Farm.”

Peter’s youngest son Isaac L. lived at the “Tide Mill Farm” from 1832, the year he married Chloe Ann VanPelt (1815-1873), until circa 1892. The original 162 acres he inherited included eight acres of wood land, nine acres of wood land and cripple, 15 acres of cedar swamp and cripple, and 130 acres of cleared land and marsh.⁵ Over the decades Isaac added more acreage to the farm. In 1840 he began by purchasing another 100 acres from John W. and Elizabeth V. Wood.⁶

The 1840 population census for Appoquinimink Hundred lists Isaac Staats’ family being the head of a household of nine, which include four males and four female and one free colored male. Out of the nine people in the household three are employed in agriculture.⁷ Curiously enough Isaac Staats does not show up in the 1850 population census for Appoquinimink Hundred, but he is listed in the Agricultural Census for that year. The Agricultural Census lists Isaac Staats as owning 150 acres of improved land and 300 acres of unimproved land, valued at \$10,000.⁸ The census indicates that Isaac Staats operated a diversified farm. He owned, among other livestock, five horses, two mules or asses, eight milk cows (which produced 520 pounds of butter), four working oxen, 34 sheep (which produced 100 pounds of wool), and seven swine. In that year he also grew 200 bushels of wheat, 1300 bushels of Indian corn, 400 bushels of oats, and 50 bushels of Irish potatoes. A tax assessment for the mid 1850’s indicates that the farmstead included at least two outbuildings to support farming activities in this period, but neither has survived to the present time. According to family history the earliest part of the present farmhouse (A) was built in 1850 and was the third dwelling to be erected on the property. The first house was located close to the Delaware River, and the second near the current granary. The 1854-56 tax assessment for Appoquinimink Hundred

does indicate that there was a frame dwelling on the property at that time.⁹

The new dwelling was a two-story, four-bay, gable-roofed, hall-parlor plan, frame dwelling, about 18 feet deep and 34 feet wide, on a fieldstone cellar with two interior gable-end chimneys. The first floor of the house contained a hall and parlor of equal size. Access to the west room of the dwelling could be gained by doors in the north and south wall, located in the second bay from the west. The west room contained an enclosed winder-staircase in the northwest corner as well as a fireplace against the west gable-end. The west room still has four rings affixed to the ceiling which were used to suspend a quilting frame from. A door in the center of the partition wall gave access to the east room. The east room had a total of four windows (two in the south wall and two in the north wall) and a fireplace against the east gable-end. On the second floor a passage ran along the north (rear) wall giving access to three chambers. The rooms against the east and west gable-end each had a fireplace, while the center room was left unheated. Access to the cellar was gained through a bulkhead located towards the west corner of the north elevation. It is also likely that the winder-staircase in the northwest corner of the west room had a flight of stairs leading down to the cellar.



From the late 1850's through 1870, Isaac Staats engaged in several land transactions, mostly with family members that altered the size of his holdings. In 1858 Isaac and his brother-in-law, Job Townsend, sold 160 acres to William S. Deakyne.¹⁰ In 1863 he purchased "Robb Marsh Island," which is located at the north end of the current property along the Delaware River from the heirs of Amy Denny.¹¹ The 1861-65 tax assessment for Appoquinimink Hundred indicates that Isaac Staats owned three tracts of land. One contained 211 acres of land and had a frame dwelling and frame barn on it, the second contained 160 acres and two frame dwellings and two outbuildings and the third contained 50 acres of salt marsh.¹² In 1868 Staats added another 67 acres to his estate from William F. Staats and his wife Marietta, who resided in Delaware County, Pennsylvania.¹³ Finally in 1870 he purchased 249 acres from George B. Rodney, who acted as a trustee for a member of the Deakyne family.¹⁴ The 1868-72 tax assessment indicates that Staats owned four tracts of land. The first one contained 140 acres with a frame house and a frame barn; the second contained 212 acres of marsh land; the third 100 acres with a frame house and a frame barn; and the third 57 acres of swamp and branch.¹⁵

During the 1850s and 1860s there appears to be little change in the farming operations at Isaac Staats' farm. In 1860 he still owned, among other livestock, six horses, two mules or asses, 13 milk cows (which produced 300 pounds of butter), two working oxen, 35 sheep (which produced 175 pounds of wool), and seven swine. In that year he also grew 460 bushels of wheat, 1000 bushels of Indian corn, 700 bushels of oats, 100 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 10 bushels of sweet potatoes.¹⁶ The 1870 Agricultural Census, however, shows a decrease in livestock. He only owned six milk cows (which produced 200 pounds of butter) and 20 sheep (which produced 49 pounds of wool). He still grew 400 bushels of wheat, but his production of Indian corn is down to 500

bushels, that of his oats to 225 bushels, and that of Irish potatoes to 40.¹⁷ There is no explanation for this change in production. There is no 1860 population census for Isaac Staats, but the 1870 census lists him as the head of a household of eight, at 61 years of age. His wife Ann (55) is keeping house and there are six children living at home of which only his oldest son, James H. (22), is listed as a farm laborer. There is also a 15 year old African-American boy, Ray Jacobs, living in the household who is also listed as a farm laborer.¹⁸ The Agricultural Census does indicate that Isaac Staats paid \$700 in wages in the year leading up to the census.

According to the 1881 Hopkins map of Delaware Isaac Staats owned 489 acres. The 1877-81 tax assessment, however, indicates that he owned a total of 612 acres divided among six tracts of land: 1) 120 acres with a frame house and barn; 2) 20 acres of low land; 3) 300 acres of wild marsh; 4) 100 acres with a frame house and barn; 5) 52 acres of swamp; and 6) 20 acres of old field.¹⁹ The 1880 agricultural census indicates a change in production. Isaac Staats has only five milk cows left (which produced 300 pounds of butter) and there are no more sheep on the farm. He has added 36 chickens to his livestock which produced 300 eggs in 1879. As for his crops he still has 16 acres of Indian corn (which produced 350 bushels), three acres of oats (which produced 50 bushels), and 16 acres of wheat (which produced 235 bushels). By 1880 he has added a one acre apple orchard with 25 bearing trees (which produced 100 bushels) and a three acres peach orchard with 300 bearing trees. Isaac Staats also holds 50 beehives on the farm.²⁰

Isaac L. and Chloe Ann VanPelt Staats had ten children who reached maturity. Chloe Ann passed away in 1873, after which Isaac married Catharine Armstrong Collins 1874.²¹ Isaac L. Staats passed away in 1892 and in his will he left a parcel of land to his second wife in Middletown, together with all his household

goods and furniture, in lieu of her dower. The remainder of his estate went to his eight surviving children.²² In 1893 the children conveyed five parcels, totaling 389 acres, to their eldest sister, Elizabeth Staats Woodkeeper.²³ Elizabeth Woodkeeper also purchased two parcels from William S. Deakyne, in 1894, which had been part of the real-estate deal between her father and her uncle and the said William S. Deakyne in 1858.²⁴ These two purchases established the 420 acres and seven parcels which make up the current property. Elizabeth and her husband, Harry A. Woodkeeper, occupied the farm with her son and young family until her death in 1912.



In 1902 the Woodkeepers built a granary (I) 240 feet northeast of the dwelling. The two-story, gable-roofed, braced-frame granary/corncrib measures approximately 22 feet wide by 30 feet long. The building was elevated off the ground by four brick foundation walls that run east to west; two are located at the gable-ends and the other two at equal distances in between. The frame consists of circular sawn members which are mortised and tenoned and secured with wooden pegs. The exterior is covered with vertical siding which has been whitewashed. The granary is three bays wide and three bays deep. Flexible ramps led to double-doors in the north and south gable-ends giving access to the drive-

through, which takes up the central bay and is flanked by corn cribs stretching the length of the building. The second floor originally served for grain storage and was accessible via a winder-staircase in the southeast corner of the building. This stair was subsequently removed as the function of the building changed. A ladder against the interior east wall of the building provided access to the second floor and several hatches were cut into the second floor walls. The first floor of the granary was later adapted for additional crop storage by constructing two “crop doors.” These “crop doors” consisted of a stud frame covered with equally spaced double-beaded, tongue-and-groove siding. A small access door was cut into the center of the doors at the bottom. The doors were hinged from the first and last ceiling joist in the central bay. When the doors were lowered they closed off the drive-through at the north and south end and provided additional storage space.

Elizabeth Staats Woodkeeper died intestate on February 16, 1912, leaving two heirs, Emma David and Harry S. Woodkeeper. Emma David and her husband Samuel conveyed the seven parcels to her brother for \$2000 in April 1912.²⁵ Harry S. Woodkeeper was already living on the farm with his mother and would remain there with his family until his death in 1946. It was during his tenure that the wing was added to the house, and the dairy barn (F) and original machine shed (J) were built.

The two-story, gable-roofed, central chimney stack, frame wing, measuring approximately 18 feet deep by 36 feet wide, was built off the west half of the north elevation in 1917. According to family history the funds for this expansion were obtained through the trapping of muskrats and the sale of their furs and meat.²⁶ The addition of the wing caused the removal of the winder-staircase in the west room of the original block, as well as the conversion of the original fireplace on the west gable-end to a stove-pipe chimney stack. The primary functional entrance to the dwelling was

reoriented from the south elevation of the original house to the west elevation of the addition, creating a stair-passage between the original block and the new wing. The kitchen and dining room were relocated in the new wing and the original block became a double parlor. On the exterior a one-story porch covered both the south and west elevations of the dwelling.

In 1927 a two-story, gable-roofed, braced-frame, dairy barn (F) was built approximately 300 feet north of the dwelling. The dairy barn measures approximately 30 feet deep by 50 feet wide and sits on a poured concrete foundation. All structural members are sash sawn, mortised and tenoned and secured with wooden pegs. The exterior of the barn is covered with whitewashed vertical siding. The barn is two bays deep, and five bays long, but the width of the five bays is irregular. The southern most bay was used as a stable area with a concrete walkway in the narrower bay to the north. There are Dutch-doors in the east and west wall giving access to the walkway, and Dutch-doors in the south-east corner of the east wall and southwest corner of the west wall giving access to the stable area. A partition wall, with two access doors, separates the southern two bays from the northern three bays. The northern three bays were used as a milking parlor, consisting of a central walkway, for human access, flanked by two aisles with milking stalls with stanchions. The metal stanchions have been removed and only the framing remains. There was room for 14 to 16 cows to be milked at the same time. A dirt floor covers these three bays of the dairy barn. Only the bottom of the feeding troughs consists of poured concrete stretching between the east and west wall. There is no evidence of any type of manure trench. Access to this section of the barn was gained by a total of six Dutch-doors; one in each of the three bays on both the east and west wall. A sliding door is located in the west bay of the north gable-end. Five windows are located in the milking parlor; one in each of

the milking aisles in the east and west wall, and one in the east bay of the north gable-end. The interior of the milking parlor section of the dairy barn was whitewashed on the interior but the interior of the stable was not. The second floor of the barn was used as a hayloft and was accessible via a ladder located against the partition wall in the southern section of the barn, and via a removable ladder in the milking section. The milking operations were ceased shortly after 1929, when new regulations for the dairy industry would have required major upgrades to the barn in order for the family to continue operations on a commercial dairy basis.



In 1935 a machine shed (J) was built just south of the granary. The one-story, gable-roofed, braced-frame building measures approximately 22 feet deep by 52 feet long and sits on a poured concrete foundation. The exterior is covered with vertical siding which has been whitewashed. All structural members are circular sawn and nailed. The building is one bay wide and five bays long. Each of the bays has its own sliding door on the east elevation. Due to this configuration the braces along the east wall of the building have been placed horizontally between the tie-beam and the plate so as not to impede with the access to each of the bays. The braces along the west wall are traditional up-braces, connecting the post to the plate and the tie-beam.

Harry S. Woodkeeper passed away in 1946 leaving the farm to his daughter, Edna H. W. Dukes.²⁷ She and her descendants continued to operate the farm focusing primarily on corn and soybeans, into the present century. In 1963 Edna Dukes conveyed the property to her son John Dukes.²⁸

In 1957 the dwelling was renovated once again, this time to accommodate two families. The original block and the 1917 wing each became individual units with their own kitchen and living room. The continuous porch was removed along the south and west elevation and was replaced by two individual porches on the south and the west elevation, both covering only two bays and each centered on the elevation.

Circa 1960 a one-story pole shed (G) was constructed off the east elevation of the dairy barn to house sheep. The shed currently houses farm equipment and has four large sliding doors on its east elevation giving access to the interior.

The large modern machine shed (D) was built by Jack (John) Dukes in 1963. The gable-roofed building measures approximately 40 feet

wide by 84 feet long and is tall enough to house modern farm equipment, such as a Harvester combiner. The building sits on a concrete block foundation with small concrete block buttresses placed at regular intervals. The exterior is covered with corrugated metal. Three large double sliding-doors, one in each gable-end and one in the west elevation, give access to the interior. Natural light to the interior is provided by transparent roofing sections. The main frame consists of steel trusses which are connected by steel rods to prevent raking. The trusses are interspersed with studs which provide additional attachment points for the siding.

The farm no longer houses any livestock or orchards, but has switched primarily to the production of corn and soybeans for the chicken industry. Despite the change in production the agricultural landscape of the farm will be preserved for the future. Jack Dukes is one of the Delaware farmers who have joined the Aglands Preservation in an effort to stem the onslaught of urban development and the steady erosion of the farming landscape of Delaware.

CHAD# 0988-N-2000

AGL# N-95-08-047

CRS# N-04247.000

Partial Intensive Fieldwork (Dates?-August 2002)

Annotated scaled field notes (X sheets)

CAD drawings (XX)

4 x 5 black and white photographs (XX)

Author: Jeroen van den Hurk

¹ Josephine Staats Ellsworth, *The Staats Family: A History of the Dutch Settlements in New York and Delaware, 1642-1992*. Wilmington, Delaware: Joseph W. Smalls Associates, Inc., 31.

² *Ibid.* 32.

³ Probate Records, Book M, Vol. 1, page 244, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware

⁴ Chancery Records A. Division of Lands, pages 151-173, 5-17-1829, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ John W. and Elizabeth V. (late Elizabeth V. Frazer) Wood to Isaac Staats, New Castle County Deed Book L, Vol. 5, page 138, 1841, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington Delaware.

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- ⁷ The list mentions one male under 5 years of age, one between 5 and 10 years, one between 15 and 20 years, and one between 30 and 40. There is one female less than 5 years age, one between 5 and 10, and two between 20 and 30 years. The free colored male is between 10 and 24 years of age.
- ⁸ Isaac Staats, Appoquinimink Hundred, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Delaware, Census of the United States, 1850, Bureau of the Census, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ⁹ Isaac Staats, 1854-56 Tax Assessments for Appoquinimink Hundred, Oversized, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ¹⁰ Isaac Staats and Job Townsend to William S. Deakyne, New Castle County Deed Book R, Vol. 7, page 195, 1858, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware. This William S. Deakyne is possibly a nephew of Isaac Staats. His oldest sister, Veronica, was married to William Deakyne, but remarried Job Townsend in 1853.
- ¹¹ Alfred and Sophia A. Denny, James Denny, Jane Denny, and Frances A. Denny to Isaac Staats, New Castle County Deed Book C, Vol. 8, page 318, 1863, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.
- ¹² Isaac Staats, 1861-65 Tax Assessments for Appoquinimink Hundred, Oversized, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ¹³ William F. and Marietta Staats to Isaac Staats, New Castle County Deed Book W, Vol. 8, page 267, 1868, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.
- ¹⁴ George B. Rodney, Trustee to Isaac Staats, New Castle County Deed Book C, Vol. 10, page 56, 1870, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.
- ¹⁵ Isaac Staats, 1868-72 Tax Assessments for Appoquinimink Hundred, Oversized, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ¹⁶ Isaac Staats, Appoquinimink Hundred, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Delaware, Census of the United States, 1860, Bureau of the Census, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ¹⁷ Isaac Staats, Appoquinimink Hundred, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Delaware, Census of the United States, 1870, Bureau of the Census, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ¹⁸ Population Census for Appoquinimink Hundred for 1870.
- ¹⁹ Isaac Staats, 1877-81 Tax Assessments for Blackbird Hundred, Oversized, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ²⁰ Isaac Staats, Appoquinimink Hundred, Manuscript Agricultural Schedules, Delaware, Census of the United States, 1880, Bureau of the Census, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ²¹ Ellsworth, 34.
- ²² Will of Isaac Staats, September 13, 1892, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ²³ Isaac R. Staats, Mary A. Staats, Emily and Charles W. Jarrell, James H. and Annie M. Staats Abram and Euphemia Staats, Fannie Staats and George Staats to Elizabeth Woodkeeper, New Castle County Deed Book A, Vol. 16, page 238, 1893, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.
- ²⁴ William S. Deakyne to Elizabeth Woodkeeper, New Castle County Deed Book A, Vol. 18, page 73, 1894, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.
- ²⁵ Samuel A. and Emma David to Harry S. Woodkeeper, New Castle County Deed Book S, Vol. 23, page 421, 1912, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.
- ²⁶ Conversation with John Dukes, July 21 2002.
- ²⁷ Will of Harry S. Woodkeeper, March 27, 1946, # 029416, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware.
- ²⁸ Edna W. H. Dukes to John and Louise Dukes, New Castle County Deed Book A, Vol. 69, page 697, 1962, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Wilmington, Delaware.